

2022-2027

Bowman County
**STRATEGIC
GROWTH PLAN**

A Unified Vision for Bowman County

Table of Contents

- Acknowledgments 3
- Project Approach 5
- Bowman County by the Numbers 6
- Bowman County’s Challenge 10
- Strategic Framework 11
- Our Goals and Strategic Objectives 13
 - Goal 1: Retain and Strengthen Bowman County Businesses 13
 - Goal 2: Attract New Businesses 15
 - Goal 3: Enhance Vibrant and Inviting Communities 17
 - Goal 4: Invest in Quality of Life and Foster a Greater Sense of Community 18
 - Goal 5: Prioritize Tourism as an Industry 19
- Background and Context 21
 - Quantitative Research: Online Surveys 21
 - Qualitative Research: Focus Group Sessions 32

Acknowledgments

This Strategic Growth Plan for Bowman County would not have been possible without the involvement and contributions of county residents, municipal officials, business owners, and the staff and board of directors of Bowman County Development Corporation.

This plan can only be implemented with the active participation and close collaboration of involved residents, county commissioners, Bowman city leaders, Rhame city leaders, Scranton city leaders, business owners, public schools, and community organizations. Working together, Bowman County can harness its resources, accentuate its assets, and maximize its potential to create a prosperous, stable, and vibrant future.

2021 BOWMAN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Board of Directors

Josh Stuchl, President; Scott Hardy, Vice President; Kevin Bucholz, Treasurer; Duane Bowman, Secretary; Alan Peters; Leah Benz; Wayne Heckaman; Jason Anderson; Lyn James; Rick Braaten; Kristy Pagel

Staff

Teran Doerr, Executive Director; Shelby Kinkade; Brooklyn Engelhart; Laura Weber; Kristi Blaser

2021 BOWMAN COUNTY COMMISSION

Rick Braaten, Josh Buchmann, Jerry Jeffers, Pine Abrahamson, Lynn Brackel

2021 BOWMAN CITY COMMISSION

Lyn James, Darren Limesand, Ryan Shear, Myron Vail, Benjamin Schaaf

2021 RHAME CITY COUNCIL

Doyle Kruger, Henry Waller, Al Getz, Deb Weiler-Burch

2021 SCRANTON CITY COUNCIL

Robb Pierce, Jason Anderson, Brent Sanford, John Truetken, Ryan Schumacher

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

May 25, 2021 Sessions – Bowman

Jen Jahner, Shonda Schwartz, Rachel Andersen, Edna Paulson, Nikki Boynton, Scott Martian, Steve Conley, Jordan Anderson, Duane Foss, Carol Foss, Tobiann Andrews, Ed Kvaale, Andy Fisher

Julie Lambourn, Nick Walker, Robb Narum, Tammy Hofland, Connie Gaebe, Jean Nudell, Mike Beylund, Kasey Burke

May 26, 2021 Sessions – Bowman

Tracy Peterson, Melinda Lynch, Tanner Fischer, Galen Strand, Ali Pretzer, Duane Foss, Carol Foss, Debbie Bucholz, Robin Mrnak, Jon Brosz

Dan Peterson, Chris Peterson, Payton Peterson, Chanell Walby, Melissa Buchholz, Mary Fuchs, Chuck Johnson, Katina Heinrich, Megan Oase, Bruce Bowman, Sara Bullis, Jason Ruggles

June 2, 2021 Session – Bowman

Barb Bickel, Andrea Bowman, Travis Teske, Gary Brennan, Nancy Schaefer, Stacy McGee, Tammie Kruger, Logan Blankenbaker, Tasha Heinrich, Wayne Heckaman, James Harriman

June 16, 2021 Session – Rhame

Casey Hande, Aurora Wallman, Dana Eagon, Haley Domagala, Brett Hendrickson, Lynette Schaefer, Brandy Getz, Misty Steeke

June 23, 2021 Session – Scranton

Korrine Mausehund, Lexi Titus, Leah Honeyman, Ila Kelner, Jeran Anderson, Shane Freitag, Devin Maychrzak, Devon Miller, Kirby Cagle

LEADERSHIP PLANNING SESSION PARTICIPANTS

September 29, 2021

Stacy McGee, Scott Hardy, Kelley Ouradnik, Chanell Walby, Dennis Goebel, Josh Stuchl, Jason Anderson, Rick Braaten, Duane Bowman, Josh Buchmann, Emily Bostyan, Myron Vail, Lyn Brackel, Kristy Pagel, Brooklyn Engelhart, Kristi Blaser, Teran Doerr, Jason Matthews – JM Strategies LLC

PUBLIC INPUT MEETING PARTICIPANTS

November 16, 2021

Teran Doerr, Kristi Blaser, Brooklyn Engelhart, Laura Weber, Peggy Allen, Cory Blaser, Lyn James, Duane Bowman, Dan Peterson, Payton Peterson, Marie Snavely, Lyn Brackel, Rick Braaten, Josh Stuchl, Scott Hardy, Kristy Pagel, Beth Criswell, Darren Limesand, Myron Vail, Ryan Shear, Melinda Lynch, Jen Jahner, Bob Morland, Benji Schaaf, Rocky Wallman, Kevin Bucholz, Casey Hande, Deb Sarsland, Nancy Schaefer, Jason Anderson

PLAN FACILITATED BY:

JM Strategies LLC

Jason Matthews, Owner and Consultant
jmstrategies.net

Project Approach

In early 2021, Bowman County Development Corporation (BCDC) undertook a multi-step process to develop a five-year strategic growth plan for Bowman County. The decision to undertake this project was based on the desire to craft a shared growth vision that elected officials, the business community, and residents could agree and work together in implementing.

Bowman County Development Corporation took the lead in managing this process on behalf of the county. Jason Matthews of JM Strategies LLC was hired to consult and facilitate this project. JM Strategies worked closely with BCDC staff in creating and executing a bottom-up planning process, which rested upon collecting extensive stakeholder input.

This plan's foundation is built upon the data that was collected through three online surveys and seven focus group sessions, which were conducted between March 1 and June 23, 2021. One-hundred-and-ninety-nine (199) residents participated in a residential online survey. A special survey of municipal leaders collected responses from 31 officials. Sixty-eight (68) high school students shared their thoughts and provided information on their future plans in another special survey. A total of 51 individuals took part in the focus group sessions.

The input collected from the research process when combined with the 2020 Census data provided a funneling effect. Common themes emerged, areas of consensus and disagreement were identified, and Bowman County's strengths, assets, weaknesses, liabilities, challenges, and opportunities were assessed through the research process.

Guided by this information – and with the purpose of developing a practical plan with a high probability of being successfully implemented in mind – growth aspirations, strategic areas of focus, goals, and strategic objectives were created during a planning session involving 31 elected officials and business community representatives on September 29, 2021.



**THREE
SURVEYS**



**SEVEN FOCUS
GROUPS**



**LEADERSHIP
MEETING**



**PUBLIC INPUT
MEETING**



**ACTION
COMMITTEE**

Bowman County by the Numbers

The 2020 Census reported a population of 2,993 residents.

AGE & PEOPLE

Median Age: 41 North Dakota: 35.5

Population by Age:

- Under 5 years: 6.6%
- Under 18 years: 24.5%
- 18 years and over: 75.5%
- 65 years and over: 20.6%

Residents 65 Years and Older: 20.6% North Dakota: 15.8%

Older Population by Years:

- 65 to 74 years: 10.2%
- 75 to 84 years: 7.5%
- 85 years and over: 2.9%

Residents Under 18 Years of Age: 24.5% North Dakota: 23.2%

Children Under 18 Years:

- Under 5 years: 6.6%
- 5 to 14 years: 14.0%
- 15 to 17 years: 3.8%

Women with Births in 2020:

- 20 to 34 years: 55
- 35 to 50 years: 24

Marital Status and History:

- Now Married: 63.0%
- Never Married: 21.3%
- Widowed: 8.1%
- Divorced: 6.4%
- Separated: 1.2%

Race:

- White (Non-Hispanic): 2,760
- Hispanic or Latino: 129
- Other Races: 104

EDUCATION

School Enrollment (3 Years and Over Enrolled in School):

- Nursery, Preschool: 4.4%
- Kindergarten to 12th Grade: 87.4%
- College, Undergraduate: 2.4%
- Graduate, Professional School: 5.7%

Educational Attainment:

- High School or Equivalent Degree: 34.6%
- Some College, No Degree: 18.9%
- Associate's Degree: 11.3%
- Bachelor's Degree: 18.9%
- Graduate or Professional Degree: 5.4%

Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 24.2%

WORKFORCE

Total Employer Establishments: 156

Employment Rate: 65.9% North Dakota: 67.3%

Annual Payroll: \$46,278

Class of Worker:

- Employee of Private Company/Business: 59.5%
- Self-Employed in Non-Incorporated Business: 13.7%
- Private Not-For-Profit Workers: 12.3%
- Local, State, and Federal Workers: 8.6%
- Self-Employed in Own Incorporated Business: 5.9%

Industry for Population 16 Years and Over:

- Agriculture, Forestry, Mining, Fishing, and Hunting: 27.8%
- Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance: 25.9%
- Retail Trade: 12.3%
- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Food Services, and Hospitality: 7.6%
- Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rental and Leasing: 4.9%
- Other Services, Except for Public Administration: 3.7%
- Wholesale Trade: 3.6%
- Professional, Management, Scientific, Administrative: 3.3%
- Construction: 3.1%
- Manufacturing: 3.0%
- Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities: 2.2%
- Information: 1.4%
- Public Administration: 1.2%

Occupation for Population 16 Years and Over:

- Management, Business, Science, and Arts: 566
- Service Occupations: 331
- Sales and Office Occupations: 268
- Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance: 251
- Production, Transportation, and Material Moving: 207

Mean Usual Hours Worked by Workers: 42.7

Mean Usual Hours Worked by Gender:

- Male: 48.4%
- Female: 36.2%

Average Commuting Time: 14.6 minutes

Means of Transportation to Work:

- Drove Alone: 78.4%
- Walked: 8.1%
- Carpool: 5.9%
- Worked at Home: 5.6%
- Other Means: 1.6%
- Public Transportation: 0.4%

HOUSEHOLDS

Total Households: 1,350

Median Household Income: \$62,442 North Dakota: \$64,577

Median Income by Types of Families:

- Families: \$88,462
- Married Couple Families: \$93,000
- Non-Family Households: \$29,545

Families and Household Characteristics:

- Married-Couple Family Household: 56.4%
- Female Householder, No Spouse: 22.0%
- Male Householder, No Spouse: 1.4%

Total Housing Units: 1,6333

Housing Occupancy:

- Occupied Housing Units: 1,294
- Vacant Housing Units: 339

Bedrooms in Occupied Housing Units:

- 1 Bedroom: 3.7%
- 2 or 3 Bedrooms: 61.6%
- 4 or More Bedrooms: 34.5%

Medium Gross Rent: \$640

Occupied Units Paying Rent:

- Less than \$500: 38.2%
- \$500 to \$999: 35.0%
- \$1,000 to \$1,499: 17.7%
- \$1,500 to \$1,999: 9.1%

SOCIAL WELL BEING

Poverty Rate: 7.8% North Dakota: 10.6%

Poverty by Age:

- Under 18 years: 5.4%
- 18 – 64 years: 8.3%
- 65 years and over: 9.2%

Residents Without Health Care Coverage: 5.2% North Dakota: 6.9%

Population with Physical Disabilities: 10.9% North Dakota: 11.4%



Bowman County's Challenge

PULL AND PUSH FACTORS

Pull and push factors are important in economic and community development. Pull factors are those assets that keep current residents while also attracting (pulling) people to locate in a community or region. In contrast, push factors are liabilities that push current residents to relocate and make a community or region unattractive to potential residents.

Agreement is not always found when it comes to identifying pull and push factors. Fortunately for Bowman County, the stakeholder research findings match up with independent analysis and the views of county decision-makers. By general agreement, the county's pull and push factors are as follows...

PULL FACTORS	PUSH FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Hospital • Location as a crossroads • Cost of living • Self-reliant communities • Bowman County Development Corporation • Desire for Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy is commodity dependent • Limited job opportunities • Decreasing social capital • Limited amenities • Appearance • Lack of shared growth vision

The consensus is critical to developing a shared growth strategy that leverages the pull factors and seeks to mitigate the push factors.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

The pull and push factors take on greater significance when coupled with the most recent census data.

The 2020 Census found Bowman County's population to be 2,993, marking the lowest ever population since the county was officially organized in 1907. Census data going back to 1910 paints a full picture of the county's population decline...

1910	4,668	1940	3,860	1970	3,901	2000	3,242
1920	4,768	1950	4,001	1980	4,229	2010	3,151
1930	5,119	1960	4,154	1990	3,596	2020	2,993

The 2020 figures mark a five percent decline from the 2010 Census. This decline is not the most significant in Bowman County's history. That decline was in 1940 when the county lost almost 25 percent of its population due to the Great Depression. However, the symbolism and significance of the county seeing its population dip below 3,000 residents cannot be overstated. Reversing this decline is – far and away – the greatest challenge facing Bowman County's decision-makers. Strategies and approaches must be taken, to the best extent possible, to increase population.

Strategic Framework

The population figures, coupled with the stakeholder research data, provide a clear strategic framework for Bowman County moving forward.

ASPIRATIONS: COMPETITIVENESS & ATTRACTIVENESS

In implementing this plan, Bowman County will work towards fulfilling its dual aspirations to...

- Strengthen its **competitive** position to attract new businesses and retain existing businesses, and
- Make the county as **attractive** as it can be to keep residents and families, attract new residents and young families, and draw visitors into Bowman County

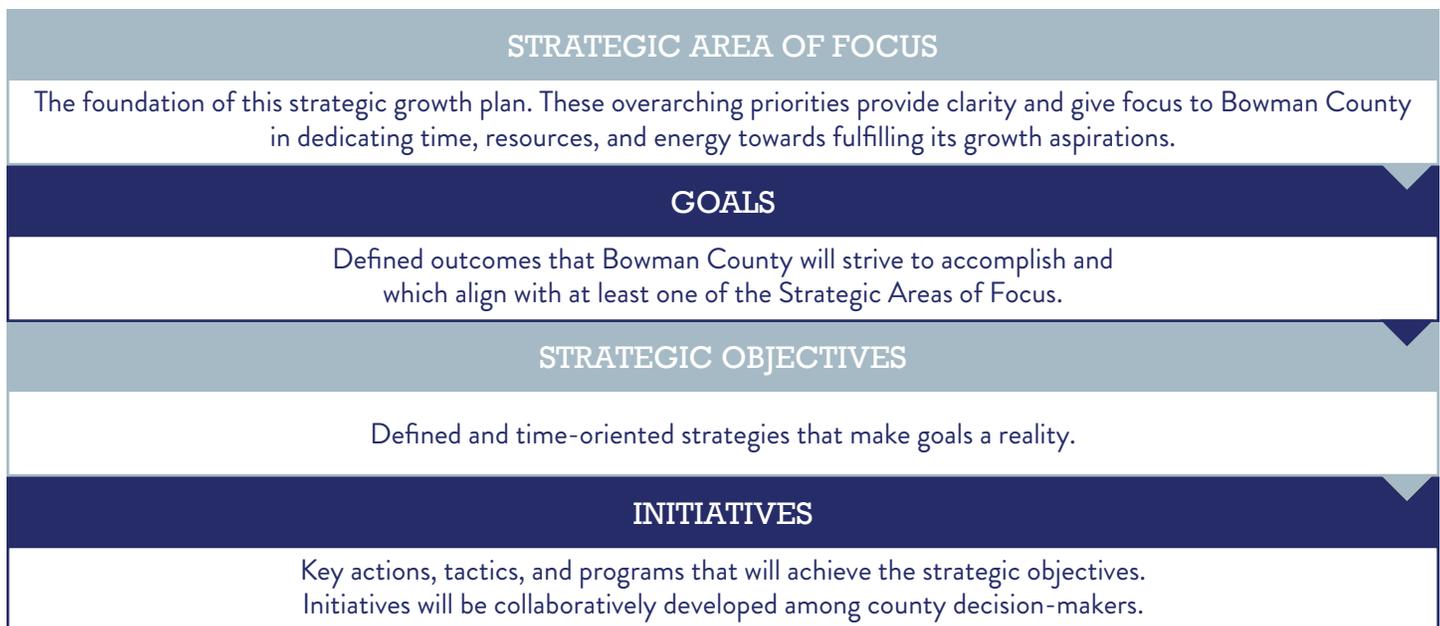
THREE STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Strategic Areas of Focus are clearly identified and overarching priorities for Bowman County. They represent broad areas for the county to focus its time, resources, and energies towards addressing over the next five years. In working on these areas, Bowman County will be fulfilling its aspirations to improve the county's attractiveness and competitiveness.

It must be noted that strategic areas of focus do not have deadlines or metrics. They provide a framework in which goals, strategic objectives, and initiatives fall under. Through the planning process the following three Strategic Areas of Focus were identified...

1. **Business Development and Retention**
2. **Workforce Attraction and Retention**
3. **Quality of Life and Place**

HOW TO INTERPRET THIS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



MAKING THIS PLAN A REALITY

The Bowman County Strategic Growth Plan was never designed to be Bowman County Development Corporation's plan. Rather, it is intended to serve as a roadmap in guiding the decisions of leaders and the business community to ensure everyone is working in common purpose to grow Bowman County. As such, the goals and strategic objectives outlined in this plan are far too large for any one entity to implement.

Collaboration and engagement among the following stakeholder groups is the surest way to guarantee meeting this plan's aspirations and guaranteeing the plan's goals and strategic objectives become a reality.

- Bowman County Commission
- Bowman City Commission
- Rhame City Council
- Scranton City Council
- Bowman County Development Corporation
- Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce
- Bowman County School District
- Scranton Public School District
- Bowman Parks and Recreation
- Community and Civic Organizations
- Residents and Business Representatives

Because a formalized approach is necessary to guide the implementation of this plan, a Bowman County Action Committee should be established comprised of officials from all three cities, business community representatives, Bowman County Development Corporation, along with representatives from Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce, interested residents, and other representatives from relevant stakeholder groups.

The Action Committee should be as representative as possible but not overly large as to make management problematic. The purpose of the Action Committee is to ensure all stakeholder groups are collaborating with one another to ensure this plan is implemented. As a best practice, the Action Committee may organize itself, as needed, into subcommittee/ work groups.

The Action Committee should develop an annual Action Platform that outlines a set of items for each elected commission, council, and board to focus on each year over the course of this five-year plan. This platform will synchronize the work of all stakeholder groups in successfully implementing this plan.



Bowman County's Population
2,993

GOAL 1:

Retain & Strengthen Bowman County Businesses

COLLABORATION IS NECESSARY TO BUSINESS RETENTION

Bowman County's existing business community is crucial to the uniqueness and stability of the entire region. The business community is facing unique challenges that county leaders must work hand-in-hand in solving. There is a need for ongoing and greater collaboration with these businesses, not only in solving their current needs, but also in helping grow industries in our region.

The number one issue facing not only the region's businesses, but also the nation, is the current workforce issue. Workforce challenges come from many fronts. For Bowman County's residents – as expressed in our surveys and focus group discussions – childcare, housing, and education are major factors contributing to the county's ability to retain workforce.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Bowman County businesses and local elected leaders must work together to retain and strengthen existing businesses and address issues impacting the county's ability to keep workers.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1-A | Encourage Local Business Expansion

Bowman County will continue to use and strengthen the Business Retention & Expansion Program to support and identify opportunities to grow existing businesses.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council, Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce

1-B | Strategically Address Childcare Shortages

Bowman County understands that childcare directly impacts workforce availability and will address childcare challenges through creating collaborative partnerships, developing and implementing creative approaches, and whenever possible, utilizing available state government and private sector funds.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council; Bowman County School District; Scranton Public School District

1-C | Address Housing Needs

Bowman County will identify housing gaps, update appropriate ordinances, address dilapidated properties, and develop practical incentives in order to address the housing needs of residents at every stage of life.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council; Southwest Healthcare Services

1-D | Develop a Workforce Council and Create Strategic Initiatives

Bowman County will create a county-wide workforce council comprised of government and business community leaders to develop targeted incentives, initiatives, and policies to address critical workforce needs.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce

1-E | Engage Businesses and Employees in Workshops and Trainings

Bowman County will offer education, coaching, and programming to small businesses that will address critical services, improve productivity, and increase overall business success and longevity. The county will work with area colleges, universities, along with public and private partners to provide offerings and trainings.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce; Bowman County School District; Scranton Public School District

1-F | Continue Workforce Development as a Part of K-12 Education

Bowman County will increase efforts to work alongside area K-12 school districts to provide programs such as T4, Marketplace for Kids, and Career Work Experience along with other potential programs; and develop a strategic partnership with the Southwest Area Career and Technical Education (CTE) Academy.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County School District; Scranton Public School District; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council



Continue Workforce Development as a Part of
K-12 EDUCATION

GOAL 2:

Attract New Businesses

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT & RETENTION GO HAND-IN-HAND

Throughout the surveys, focus groups, and specifically the planning session it was highly emphasized that for Bowman County to grow and to add jobs with upward mobility, business attraction must be a major key focus.

An aggressive business recruitment strategy paired with the existing formal Business Retention and Expansion Program may lead to the success in recruiting new business to the area. With a strong existing industry base in agriculture and energy, there is an opportunity to not only cultivate local industry for growth but also create additional opportunities.

One of the biggest mistakes a community can make in their new business recruitment efforts is to take a very general approach to attracting new business. If Bowman County is not laser focused on its approach to recruitment, it risks wasting significant funds on unrealistic pursuits.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Bowman County will develop and implement a business recruitment strategy based upon:

- Strengthening existing industry relationships;
- Understanding current assets and how they translate in a desired market;
- Being realistic about what can be accomplished; and
- Strategically emphasizing the county's assets and strengths.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

2-A | Identify Target Industries

Bowman County will identify industries that will have the highest likelihood of success for recruitment allowing for the best use of resources.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

2-B | Be Business Ready

Bowman County will evaluate policies and initiatives and where necessary, make changes to ensure the county has a competitive business climate.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

2-C | Build Networks and Involve Key Players

Bowman County will build networks with partners, industry leaders, and stakeholders to help drive recruitment.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

2-D | Aggressively Market Bowman County's Strengths and Assets

Bowman County will strategically market itself through digital and print advertising campaigns and trade/industry shows as a place to do business based upon the county's strengths and assets. Chief among these are the county's agriculture and energy sectors, location, the Highway 85 corridor, and quality of life opportunities.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

2-E | Undertake a Systematic Business Recruitment Effort

Bowman County will develop a realistic and systematic business recruitment approach using partnerships and understanding how the county's assets translate into desired markets.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council



Bowman County will
BE BUSINESS READY

GOAL 3:

Enhance Vibrant & Inviting Communities

ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITIES BENEFIT RESIDENTS AND DRAW IN VISITORS

With increased workforce competition it is imperative that Bowman County focuses on creating welcoming and inviting communities and business districts. Research backs that quality of place matters.

Beautification and vibrancy lie at the heart of efforts that improve a community's quality of place. Public spaces that are clean, have places to sit down, and are close to trees, flowers, and outdoor art invite tourists and make residents happier, more relaxed, and feel safer. Economic data shows businesses located in areas with beautification elements also experience higher foot traffic and increased sales.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Bowman County will make strategic investments to improve the attractiveness of its communities to the benefit of its residents and businesses.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

3-A | Increase Vibrancy on Main Streets

Bowman County will make investments to enhance downtown business districts to increase commerce. Enhancements may include incorporating greenspace, outdoor seating, and improved lighting.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

3-B | Create Easy to Navigate Communities

Bowman County will invest in wayfinding signage to capitalize on its critical location as crossroads to the North Dakota Badlands, the Black Hills, and as a gateway to the west.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

3-C | Identify and Invest in Signature Spaces

Bowman County will enhance the visual appeal of its communities by identifying and designating signature spaces, which may incorporate public art and provide amenities for public events and community gatherings.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council; Bowman Parks and Recreation

3-D | Improve Community Entrances and Primary Travel Corridors

Bowman County will prioritize drawing visitors to the region by enhancing community entrances, improving signage along travel corridors, cleaning up dilapidated properties, and expanding business facade grants to improve storefronts throughout the county.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

GOAL 4:

Invest in Quality of Life & Foster a Greater Sense of Community

QUALITY OF LIFE AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY ARE ESSENTIAL TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The decrease in social capital, the degree to which individuals are connected to their neighbors and involved in their community, has resulted in the diminishment of the collective sense of community. In many ways, this is one of the greatest challenges facing communities of every size today. Bowman County is not immune from this challenge.

In the past, a sense of community was organic having grown out of shared experiences and common customs. The times have changed and communities must not only invest in creating the infrastructure that supports a sense of community but also undertake efforts to foster and maintain it.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Bowman County will view quality of life as essential to economic growth and workforce recruitment and retention, and will make investments to improve quality of life for residents of all ages along with fostering a sense of community.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

4-A | Market Events, Recreational Opportunities, and Activities

Bowman County will use traditional, digital, and social media to promote events, recreational opportunities, and activities to residents and those outside of the area.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce; Bowman Parks and Recreation, Pioneer Trails Regional Museum

4-B | Increase Community Development Initiatives

Bowman County will support, maintain, and initiate efforts for community development activities – such as festivals, signature events, and farmer’s markets – that enhance quality of life and place, bring residents together, and draw visitors to the county.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman Area Chamber of Commerce; Bowman Parks and Recreation

4-C | Invest in and Improve Bowman County’s Recreational Infrastructure

Bowman County will make key investments to recreational infrastructure such as Bowman Parks and Recreation’s expansion, improvements to the county fairgrounds, and other identified projects.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council; Bowman Parks and Recreation; Bowman County Fair Association

4-D | Explore Creating a Bowman County Arts Council

Bowman County will explore an arts council consisting of interested residents, business leaders, and civic leaders. This council would create programming and events to enhance Bowman County's quality of life. The arts council could also enable Bowman County to leverage available federal, state, and private sector resources to draw visitors to the county.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation will initiate the process

GOAL 5: Prioritize Tourism as an Industry

CAPITALIZING ON TOURISM POTENTIAL WILL HELP STRENGTHEN CURRENT ECONOMIC HEALTH

Agriculture and energy are, and will always remain, the cornerstones of Bowman County's economy. Actions must always be taken to add value to these key sectors. While everyone acknowledges these industries' vital role to Bowman County, the planning process highlighted the need for economic diversification. Considering Bowman County's location, the most immediate opportunity lies in increasing tourism as a major industry in the region.

Many opportunities exist for expanding tourism including the new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library. This attraction will draw tens of thousands of visitors to the region. The library has the potential to serve as both a gateway for visitors traveling to the Black Hills and a magnet drawing tourists to western North Dakota. Bowman County is uniquely equipped to capitalize on this opportunity.

Tourism largely relates to the overall visitor experience which correlates with beautification efforts, signage, and marketing. These were noted in other areas of the plan as well so focusing on those will not only improve quality of life for residents, but also help in driving tourism traffic into county businesses.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Bowman County will view tourism as the third leg of its economic development stool and make the investments and take the initiative necessary to maximize this industry's potential.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

5-A | Strategically Market Bowman County as a Tourist Destination

Bowman County will strategically market itself as a destination for visitors with emphasis placed on outdoor recreational opportunities.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman Parks and Recreation; Pioneer Trails Regional Museum

5-B | Capture Theodore Roosevelt Library Traffic

Bowman County will specifically target visitors to the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library by positioning the county as the gateway to the Black Hills and the American West.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Pioneer Trails Regional Museum

5-C | Maximize Tourism Funds to Support Efforts

Bowman County will continue to use local and state tourism funding to support efforts in tourism industry growth.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation; Bowman County Commission; Bowman City Commission; Scranton City Council; Rhame City Council

5-D | Develop Key Partnerships

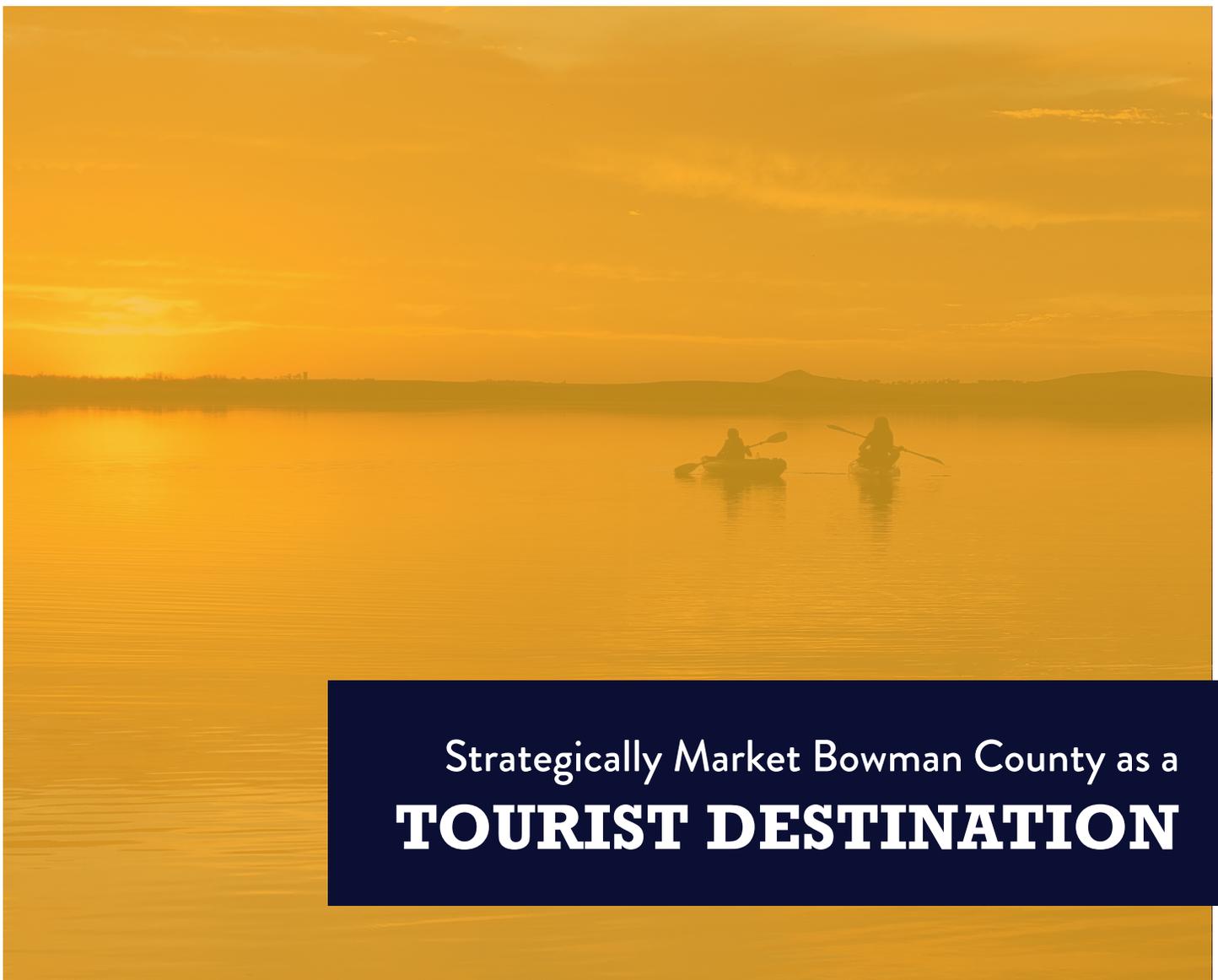
Bowman County will strengthen existing relationships and create new partnerships with regional and state tourism partners.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation

5-E | Create a Unique Draw for Bowman County

Bowman County will actively engage the public in developing and implementing a unique attraction that draws visitors to the county.

Responsible Parties: Bowman County Development Corporation



Strategically Market Bowman County as a
TOURIST DESTINATION

Quantitative Research: Online Surveys

The following three online surveys were administered from March 3 – April 12, 2021. The findings from these surveys had a funneling effect that identified common themes, areas of concern, and subjects in need of further clarification.

Residential Survey

The first step in the research process was an online survey of Bowman County residents. Individuals were invited to answer 22 questions on various aspects of economic and community development. JM Strategies designed the questions to capture residents' sentiments, perceptions, and attitudes. The survey was available on Bowman County Development Corporation's website from March 3 – 31, 2021. One hundred and ninety-nine (199) residents participated in the survey. All residents within the county were mailed information on how to complete the survey.

Leadership Survey

The residential survey findings raised talking points and provided the framework for a follow-up survey of county leaders. Elected and administrative officials with the following groups were invited to submit responses: Bowman County Development Corporation Board of Directors and staff; Bowman County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors; Bowman County Commissioners and key staff; Bowman City Commissioners and city staff; Rhame City council members and city staff; Scranton City Council members and city staff; Bowman County School Board, administration, and staff; Scranton Public School Board, administration, and staff; and Bowman Parks & Recreation Board. This targeted, online survey asked eight (8) questions and was available from April 1 - April 12, 2021.

Thirty-one (31) officials submitted responses, which were all anonymous.

High School Juniors and Seniors Survey

A special online survey was sent to Bowman County High School and Scranton High School for distribution to juniors and seniors. Sixty-eight (68) students responded (38 juniors and 30 seniors) to 11 questions regarding their future plans, impressions of Bowman County, qualities they want in a community, and recommendations on making Bowman County a better place to live and work.

Below are results to specific questions from each of the three surveys along with key takeaways and findings.

RESIDENTIAL SURVEY RESULTS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Residential Survey Participants

The survey asked a series of demographic questions to understand the make-up and background of the 199 residents who participated in the survey.

Gender: Females far outnumbered males with 134 females and 65 males participating in the survey.

Age: Seventy percent (70%) of survey participants were between the ages of 30 and 64. The full breakdown is as follows...

• 30 – 49	91	46%
• 50 – 64	49	25%
• 65 or older	36	18%
• 18 – 29	20	10%
• 17 or younger	3	1%

How long have you lived in Bowman County?

• 21 or more years	74	37%
• Entire life	40	20%
• 11 – 20 years	39	20%
• 5 – 10 years	30	15%
• Less than five years	15	8%

Highest level of education attained:

• Bachelor's degree	69	35%
• Graduate or professional degree	38	19%
• Associate's degree	35	18%
• Some college but no degree	30	15%
• High School graduate or GED	21	11%
• Workforce certification	6	3%

Where participants work:

• Private business employee	58	29%
• Private business owner	31	16%
• Education – teacher, administrator, paraprofessional, employee	27	14%
• Nonprofit employee or manager	24	12%
• Other (please specify)	21	11%
• Retired	20	10%
• Government employee – local, county, state, federal	18	9%

What Residents Want and Perceive...

The following questions asked residents to express their wishes for economic development and offer their assessment on a range of amenities and services, assets and liabilities, strengths, challenges, and threats.

From an economic development standpoint, where do you want to see Bowman County in the next five years? (Select three choices.)

• An economy with a range of job opportunities that offer upward mobility	117
• Communities with a vibrant Main Street	107
• Communities that appeal to young families	104
• Support of start-ups and entrepreneurs	47
• Provide value-added opportunities for agriculture	47
• Increased population	39
• Continuing education programs and opportunities	32
• Increase per capita income	31
• Increased number of visitors to the country	13
• Mentorship opportunities for future community leaders	12

Please rate the following business and community services and amenities.

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Our Needs	Improvements Are Necessary	Serious Problems Exist	No Opinion
Cell phone service	13	128	44	10	2
Internet service	32	131	29	3	3
Utilities	29	142	18	4	2
Emergency services	41	122	29	1	3
Access to health care services	25	103	56	13	2
Nursing/assisted living	23	100	47	10	18
Housing availability	22	76	74	29	13
Overall condition of housing inventory	6	78	76	21	15
City streets and county highways/roads	30	108	51	10	0
Entertainment and dining	1	21	105	70	0
Arts & cultural programs/facilities	2	52	86	37	22
Wellness & exercise facilities	25	115	46	5	8

How well does Bowman County meet your expectations in the following areas?

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
Employment opportunities at all income levels	7	62	86	41	3
Career advancement at all income levels	4	43	96	52	4
Wage levels	4	62	88	42	3
Entrepreneurial support	6	50	103	32	6
Cost of living	7	70	67	47	7
Community leadership	16	63	71	36	12
County leadership	9	61	78	38	12
'Quality of Life' amenities	6	72	70	43	8
Activities and things to do	1	53	57	71	71

How would you fill in the following statements? "I am..."

... to recommend Bowman County as a place to live."

- Very Likely 88 44%
- **Somewhat Likely 92 46%**
- Not Likely 19 10%

... to recommend Bowman County as a place to start a business."

- Very Likely 46 23%
- **Somewhat Likely 102 51%**
- Not Likely 50 26%

... to recommend Bowman County as a place to visit."

- Very Likely 59 30%
- **Somewhat Likely 95 48%**
- Not Likely 45 23%

... to relocate outside of Bowman County."

- Very Likely 22 11%
- Somewhat Likely 63 32%
- **Not Likely 114 58%**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Combining very likely and somewhat likely responses provides a clear picture as to residents' positive and negative sentiments.

- **90%** would recommend Bowman County as a place to live.
- **74%** would recommend Bowman County as a place to start a business.
- **78%** would recommend Bowman County as a place to visit.
- While **58%** are not likely to relocate outside of Bowman County, **43%** indicated that they would or are considering leaving the county.



Recommend Bowman County as a Place to Live
90%

What do you see as Bowman County's greatest strengths and weaknesses?

	Major Strength	Strength	Weakness	Major Weakness	No Opinion
Affordability of living	9	91	56	16	24
Available buildings/lots for new businesses	11	117	39	8	22
Quality K-12 Education	66	100	12	2	19
Health Care	28	97	53	16	4
Ease of doing business/regulatory environment	14	114	28	7	36
Tax environment	8	95	35	13	46
Quality of life amenities	7	79	66	24	21
Crime and personal safety	61	104	20	7	7
Access and affordability of high-speed Internet for homes and businesses	41	113	32	3	10
Organized business leadership	12	78	51	14	43
Support for existing leadership	8	69	53	16	50
Housing options (rental and home ownership)	8	99	50	13	26
City streets and county highways/roads	30	116	33	10	10
A shared vision of where Bowman County is going	7	53	72	23	43
Workforce skills and availability	2	63	77	30	27

In your opinion, what are Bowman County's three greatest assets? (Select three options)

• K-12 education	146
• Sense of community	93
• Location	59
• Access to medical care	58
• Desirable cost of living	53
• Job opportunities and options	15
• Community amenities	14
• Skilled workforce to meet the needs of the county	13
• Business retention and expansion	9
• Ability to attract new businesses and industries	6
• Vibrant Main Streets	6
• Regional attractions/visitor destination	5

In your opinion, what is Bowman County's greatest economic challenge? (Choose only one option)

• Lack of available workforce	85
• Providing adequate job opportunities	41
• Providing adequate amenities (education, retail, health care, parks, etc.)	31
• Providing a suitable range of housing options	18
• Providing adequate services and utilities	5

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Bowman County's economy?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Businesses are growing	3	22	76	84	13
K-12 schools offer a quality education	57	109	27	5	1
Bowman County is a visitor destination	3	29	66	81	19
Bowman County is a business destination	3	29	67	87	13
Local government and businesses cooperate on community and economic development	10	64	88	31	6
Wages and salaries make it possible to maintain my standard of living	10	82	60	39	8
Entrepreneurs can start businesses and succeed	3	52	83	55	5
Infrastructure is well maintained and meets needs	18	88	68	21	4
The overall mix of employers is adequate	4	56	80	53	5

How would you rate the performance of the economy in Bowman County over the last five (5) years?

• A – Excellent	3	2%
• B – Above Average	38	19%
• C – Average	101	51%
• D – Below Average	43	22%
• F – Failure	4	2%
• Unsure	10	5%

What are the biggest threats to Bowman County's economic resiliency? (Please click all that apply.)

• Limited number of businesses and industries	119
• Aging population	116
• Limited workforce	115
• Lack of local support	52
• Income inequality	34
• Location	32

What should be the region's top three priorities for economic development? (Please select three strategies.)

• Attract and retain young professionals and families	125
• Encourage the growth of existing businesses and industries	83
• Improve the quality of life and regional amenities such as livability and recreation	76
• Encourage downtown revitalization	75
• Encourage recruitment and diversification to create higher-paying jobs	63
• Increase job skills of local labor force	44
• Create a unified vision and strategy for regional growth	34
• Improve the availability of a range of housing options	27
• Create a strong entrepreneurial climate	26
• Improve government cooperation on a regional level	10
• Improve access and affordability of high-speed Internet for homes and businesses	8

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Residents' Assessments: Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

- Quality K-12 education
- Low crime and public safety
- High speed Internet
- Highways, roads, and streets
- Affordability of living
- Regulatory environment
- Lots for new businesses
- Health care
- Tax environment
- Organized business leadership

Weaknesses:

- Workforce availability and skills
- Lack of a shared growth vision
- Lack of quality of life amenities

Residents' Level of Agreement

Agree

- K-12 schools offer quality education
- Infrastructure meets needs
- Wages / salaries maintain standard of living
- Businesses and government cooperate on development
- Overall mix of employers is adequate (TIE)

Disagree

- Bowman County is a visitor destination
- Bowman County is a business destination
- Businesses are growing
- Entrepreneurs can start businesses and succeed
- Overall mix of employers is adequate (TIE)

Residents' Assessments: Assets, Challenges, Threats, and Priorities

GREATEST ASSETS	GREATEST CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 schools • Sense of community • Location • Access to medical care • Desirable cost of living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of available workforce • Lack of adequate job opportunities • Providing adequate amenities
ECONOMIC RESILIENCY THREATS	TOP PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited businesses and industries • Aging population • Limited workforce • Population decline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract/retain young workers and families • Grow existing businesses • Quality of life amenities • Downtown revitalization

Residents' Top Three Economic Development Priorities

- An economy with a range of job opportunities that offer upward mobility
- Communities with vibrant Main Streets
- Communities that appeal to young families

MUNICIPAL LEADERS SURVEY RESULTS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Please select the **ONE** word or phrase from the following list that you feel best describes the current state of Bowman County’s economy? (Please select one word or phrase.)

• Holding Its Own	18
• Under appreciated	4
• Successful	3
• Limited	2
• Struggling	2
• Declining	1
• Failing	1

What do you feel have been the most successful strategies when it comes to economic and community development over the last five (5) years? (Please select three answers.)

• Business assistance for new, existing, and expanding businesses	18
• Downtown Facade Grant / Storefront Grant Program	13
• Business Retention & Expansion Program	10
• BND Pace / Flex Pace / Microloans and CD Guarantees	9
• Mainspace Education Classes	7
• Restaurant recruitment	6
• Attracting grant funding	4
• Recreational Programs	4
• Renaissance Zone	3
• Deck the Streets / Festival of Lights / Main Street Garden	3
• Crossroads Business Park	3
• Business Challenge	3
• On the Market – Vacant Building Tour	3
• Business Broadcast / COVID-19 Business Support	3
• Infrastructure: Roads / Bridges / Sidewalks	3
• Empowering Leaders	2
• Fusion	2
• Community Challenge	2
• Bowman County High School Career Fair	1
• Marketplace for Kids	1
• BowmanND.com Website	1
• Census	1
• Burgers in the Park	1

When it comes to economic development, quality of life, or growth what opportunities do you think exists for Bowman County? Why?

Responses fell along the following lines...

- Location as a crossroads and gateway
- Public safety, low crime
- Family friendly

Please tell us what you’d like to see come out of this planning process and/or be addressed in the Strategic Growth Plan.

Responses fell along the following lines...

- Getting leadership to come together around a shared growth vision – “creating a roadmap for all leadership to follow”
- Determining common goals and metrics by which to measure progress
- Business retention and recruitment
- Workforce training
- Building upon Bowman County’s strengths and resources

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' SURVEY RESULTS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

A total of 68 students participated in the survey with 56 students attending Bowman County High School and 12 attending Scranton Public High School. Thirty-nine (39) students were male and 29 were female. Broken down by grade, 38 students were juniors and 30 were seniors.

What is the highest level of education you plan to complete?

- Bachelor's degree or more 30
- Associate's degree 13
- Undecided 8
- Professional training and/or apprenticeship 6
- Other (please specify) 4
- Master's or professional graduate degree 3
- High school diploma only 2
- Doctorate degree 2

Other Responses: Associate's degree in three years, cosmetology, mentorship, military

If you are planning to go to college, please select which colleges you are looking at attending or have been accepted to attend.

- Bismarck State College 20
- Dickinson State University 17
- Black Hills State University 15
- North Dakota State University 13
- University of Mary 13
- Other (please specify) 10
- University of North Dakota 9
- Montana State University 5
- North Dakota State College of Science 4
- Williston State College 3
- Minot State University 2
- University of Jamestown 2
- Trinity Bible College 2
- Concordia College 2
- South Dakota State University 2
- University of Montana 1
- Northern State University 1

Other Responses:

- University of Kansas
- Mentorship 2 responses
- Southwest Minnesota State University
- Butler Professional Farrier School
- Josef's School of Hair, Skin, and Body (Fargo, ND) 2 responses
- Fort Hays University (Hays, KS) or Casper College (Casper, WY)
- The Hair Academy (Bismarck, ND)
- Cosmetology

Please tell us what field you will study or career you plan to train for. Please list undecided if you are unsure.

- Accounting
- Agribusiness or accounting or banking
- Agronomy
- Animal Science
- Athletic training
- Business (Administration or Management) 6 responses
- Carpentry 2 responses
- Chiropractic
- Combat Engineer, USMC
- Construction (Management or Technology) 3 responses
- Cosmetology 5 responses
- Day trading, social networking, and a full-time job
- Education 3 responses
- Elementary Education 2 responses
- Electricity
- Engineering 2 responses
- Engineering or Medical Doctor
- Exercise Science 2 responses
- Farm and Ranch Management/Agribusiness
- Farrier and start my own business
- Finance / Banking 3 responses
- Heating and Air
- Instrumentation Control Technology and Telecommunications
- Lineman or some sort of electrician
- Line Worker
- Major in English and Minor in Creative writing
- Military Police or Aircraft Maintenance
- Nursing
- Oilfield or trucking
- Physics
- Pre-Dental / Biology 2 responses
- Pre-Med
- Radiology 2 responses
- Ranch Management
- Social work
- Teacher or business
- Welding and Machining
- Welding/farrier school/ranch management
- Undecided 12 responses



Bowman County's Greatest Asset
K-12 EDUCATION

Do you plan to stay in Bowman County or return to Bowman County after college (or working elsewhere)?

- No, I plan to leave Bowman County for further education (or work) and, at this time, I don't plan to return to Bowman County. 34
- I will leave for further education but would be open to returning to Bowman County if an opportunity is available. 17
- Yes, I plan to leave for further education but plan to return to Bowman County following college. 8
- I will leave Bowman County for work after high school (not going on for further education or training) but would be open to returning to Bowman County if an opportunity is available. 5
- Yes, I plan to stay and work in Bowman County after high school graduation. 4

KEY TAKEAWAY

This is a classic example of seeing the glass as half-full or half-empty. Fifty percent (50%) of students are either planning to stay, return, or are open to returning to Bowman County.

We want you to think about the qualities you want in a community where you would want to live and work in the future. Please select up to five amenities (features) and/or qualities that you most want in a community.

- Restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, and other businesses for socializing 55
- Movie, performance theaters, bowling, etc. 34
- Job opportunities 34
- Affordable housing 34
- Swimming pool, recreation center, exercise facilities, etc. 33
- Hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation, etc. 32
- Health care services (clinics, hospitals, chiropractor, dentist, optometrist, etc.) 32
- Retail shopping options 28
- Nightlife 21
- Schools and playgrounds 19
- Paved trail systems for walking, running, biking, etc. 18
- Proximity to larger cities 16
- Parks and green spaces 12
- Childcare providers 11
- Social and professional organizations/clubs for you to join 4

TOP FIVE AMENITIES AND QUALITIES

1. Restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, socializing businesses
2. TIE: Job opportunities, affordable housing, movie/performance theaters, bowling alley
3. TIE: Swimming pool, recreation center, exercise facilities
4. TIE: Outdoor recreation, health care services
5. Retail shopping

Qualitative Research: Focus Group Sessions

Seven (7) focus group sessions were held from May 25 - June 23, 2021.

- Four (4) sessions were held in-person at the offices of Bowman County Development Corporation on May 25 and 26, 2021.
- A fifth session was held via Zoom on June 2, 2021.
- A sixth session was held in Rhame on June 16, 2021.
- The final session was held on June 23, 2021 in Scranton.

JM Strategies developed, in collaboration with Bowman County Development Corporation, seven (7) prepared questions for the focus group sessions. These questions sought:

- Insights into how Bowman County residents define economic development and community development;
- Clarification on perceptions and expectations when it comes to Main Streets; what a livable wage and upward mobility looks like in Bowman County;
- Recommendations and approaches to retaining current jobs and attracting new jobs;
- Comparisons to other similar communities and counties;
- How to appeal to young families;
- Recommendations for local elected officials; and
- Desired outcomes from the planning process.

The same questions were asked in each session. When necessary, follow-up questions were asked for further clarification or to elaborate on insights provided by participants. Focus groups were representative of all ages and backgrounds from across the county.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Participants were open and eager to share their opinions. Many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the process. It was evident through the discussions that the seven (7) groups were comprised of a good mix of informed residents, businesses, and community members. While one should never claim any focus group is a representative sample of the population at large, these groups were – in the observation of the facilitator – as close as one is going to get to a such a sample.

The summary of discussions below provide a comprehensive picture of the views expressed. There are some major findings that must be considered further in the planning process. Among the key takeaways are...

Clear Definitions and Expectations on Economic Development and Community Development:

For the majority, economic development is defined as relating solely to businesses and jobs. This should not come as a surprise but, as is often the case in rural areas, there is a blurring of the two. Often 'economic development' becomes a catch-all term that can be expanded well-beyond its true definition. Participants see community development as largely complementary to economic development but the majority do not see community development as a sole responsibility of Bowman County Development Corporation. Rather, a clear consensus emerged that community development is the responsibility of many, including elected officials.

Desire for More Involvement and Engagement from Elected Officials:

A significant number of participants expressed desire for elected officials to be more engaged in community development, connect with the business community, and be available to the public. The tone of most of these comments were not accusatory or derogative, but were often expressed in an inviting manner.

Main Street Has Changed – Views of Main Street Have Not:

Participants all acknowledged that views of Main Street are frozen in a bygone era. While some participants lamented the decline of retail and the impact of online shopping, a clear majority accepted this reality. Some stated there is no going back. Younger participants, especially, don't necessarily see this as a negative. For them and other participants what is needed is to give reasons for people to come to Main Street. Many recommendations offered centered on creating niche businesses, offering workspace and meeting spaces for at-home employees, and – most importantly – making Main Street a cultural destination within the community. Outdoor seating, parks, gazebos, trees, and flowers were offered as suggestions to transform Main Streets.

Furthermore, participants do not think Main Street properties need to be solely dedicated to traditional businesses but were open for use in other ways that serve the community, i.e.: arts and crafts centers, class and workshop facilities, recreational venues, etc.

On this point, recreation – both capitalizing on the region's natural opportunities and community-driven and provided recreation – was a topic interwoven into the parts of the conversation in each focus group.

Biggest Challenges – Affordable Housing and Workforce Shortages:

The lack of available inventory and/or affordable housing was cited in each focus group. The issue prompted a lot of discussion within the Bowman focus group sessions. A majority want something done to address housing concerns through a combination of policies, actions, and incentives. The Rhame focus group seconded what was said in two of the Bowman sessions about the need to clear out run-down properties. Rhame participants went further in stating the county has “some zoning issues” and wanting county and city leaders to review and revise zoning policies along with enforcing ordinances.

Everyone acknowledges the workforce shortage to be a significant challenge. For some participants it's simply a reality and a problem that is not going away in the near future. For others it poses a significant obstacle for the county to overcome. Most participants in five of the seven groups touched on how Bowman County is now competing with other counties and communities, especially in the post-COVID-19 economy.

Biggest Opportunity – The Post-Covid-19 Remote Economy:

Almost every participant views the COVID-19 pandemic as an economic game-changer. With the appeal and practice of remote work expected to grow, most participants believe Bowman County needs to make efforts at attracting people to settle in the county. “Selling our lifestyle” is what one participant described the approach. Targeting former residents or those with family in the area were suggestions from many participants. Still, there were some voices who expressed the view that Bowman County still has to target industries that can be located in the area. One participant specifically cited the potential of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and drone technology as a possibility. Others talked about value-added agriculture. Many spoke about niche businesses that serve their community and can draw people in. All believe the hospital is an essential asset to the county with one stating that keeping the hospital open has to “always be the top priority.”

Wages Need to Address Real Economic Needs – Benefits are a Must:

Animated discussions were held regarding how one defines a livable wage in Bowman County. While hard numbers are difficult to nail down, a large majority of participants believe jobs brought into the county should offer benefits, with one stating: “Benefits are more important than salary.” In this vein, participants – especially young parents or grandparents of young children – talked about the importance of childcare. Of these individuals, it is fair to state all of them see childcare as an economic development issue and essential to keeping young families here and bringing young families into Bowman County. The Scranton focus group was complimentary of the city's successful effort to bring a childcare provider into the community and held the effort up as an example of how to address the issue.

People Want a Shared Vision but – Most Importantly – They Want Action:

Many participants expressed enthusiasm for the undertaking of the planning process. Some expressed skepticism. All stated they want actions to result from the plan. Overall, most want a shared vision where the business community, elected officials, and residents know where Bowman County is going. More than a few said they want goals to be “realistic.” A few cautioned that Bowman County Development Corporation is going to have to “manage expectations” in the implementation of the plan. “Follow through” was a common phrase expressed in each focus group session. Another phrase – and request – was “communication.” Several participants expressed the wish that once the plan is finalized that follow-up forums be held to inform the public on progress and gather feedback.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Participants in the residential survey were asked to select from a range of options in response to this question: “Where do you want to see Bowman County in the next five years?” Respondents identified the following as the top three (3) priorities:

- An economy with a range of job opportunities that offer upward mobility.
- Communities with a vibrant Main Street.
- Communities that appeal to young families.

The focus group sessions sought clarity and definition. The first questions in our seven (7) sessions asked participants questions that touched on these three areas.

DEFINING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Overall, all seven (7) groups defined economic development as pertaining to **actions, policies, and incentives to bring in new businesses, assist existing businesses, and creating new jobs.**

Growing the economy or at least maintaining Bowman County’s current economy underscored participants’ sentiments. Opinions did not differ among the three communities (Bowman, Rhame, and Scranton). One participant did emphasize that economic development, as he saw it, was at its core about expanding the tax base to provide revenues to cities and the county to provide services and meet infrastructure needs. Some specifically mentioned schools, the hospital, and clinics as essential to Bowman County’s economic development as it provides good jobs, essential services, and draws people to want to locate in the region.

Most see community development as complimentary to economic development because almost all participants expressed views that are best captured by one participant: “You have to offer things that bring people here and keep people here. Economic development and community development do go hand in hand but different groups have different responsibilities in providing for each.”

A majority of participants used one or more of the following terms to define economic development: **businesses, jobs, growing or growth, recruiting and retaining, sustainability, and opportunity.**

One participant emphasized the need for Bowman County’s economic development approach to be adaptable to changing realities, citing specifically the decrease in energy production and the new working environments brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The group in Rhame specifically, and to a lesser extent in Scranton, expressed the view that growth must be as ‘equitable’ as possible among the three communities. One participant also stressed the importance of home-based businesses and the role they play and will play in the future by noting: “They contribute to our economy too.”

DEFINING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Participants were unanimous in their sentiments about community development. All see community development in varying degrees as involving activities, creating gathering spaces, events, and programs that “keep people here... keeps people involved... engage people... bring people together.”

Differences by Age:

Beyond this, participants’ views diverged largely along age. Older participants spoke about healthcare and the desire for special senior programming with some talking about educational and social programs for seniors. Participants with children spoke of recreation and family-focused activities. Young, single professionals talked about the need to offer non-alcohol-related activities to meet other singles and get involved in the community.

Volunteers are Essential:

Most talked about amenities and services and how volunteers are essential but hard to find these days. “It’s always the same people volunteering,” noted one participant who earned nods from all the participants in a Bowman focus group.

“Harder than Economic Development”:

One person said: “Community development is harder than economic development.” All the other participants in the group agreed. When pressed as to why this is the case, participants stated that so much of community development is about quality of life and quality of place. “Everyone has a responsibility to improve the community. It’s not just one group or person,” observed a participant. Another said: “Bowman County needs a vision for each of its communities.”

Some, however, were pessimistic. These participants expressed views that touched on limited resources, lack of leadership by local elected officials, declining participation in organizations, and the ease with which to pass responsibility off to others, most notably Bowman County Development Corporation. One participant stated: “They (Bowman County Development Corporation) have enough on their plate. They need to focus on businesses and jobs. They can’t be responsible for community events and programs. That’s why we have park boards, city councils, and social clubs.”

ANSWERING THE QUESTION: “WHAT IS A VIBRANT MAIN STREET?”

The facilitator asked participants what their idea of a vibrant Main Street is and where they see the highway corridor fitting in with their idea and overall vision. The comments shared in each of the seven groups were revealing and, when combined, reveal areas of consensus that provide both clarity and direction for county decision makers.

Areas of Consensus

“Not 1950s anymore”:

One participant expressed a view shared by almost all across each of the focus groups. When it comes to Main Street, this participant observed, it is “not the 1950s anymore.” Almost all participants noted that realities have changed. People buy goods online or from chains and big box stores. Consumers are willing to drive many miles away for staples, even groceries. As a result, many Main Street businesses today consist of service “nine to five” businesses and bars. Retail is not what it once was. However, most participants believe our mindsets are still locked back to the way things were 40 to 50 years ago.

Highway Corridor is an Advantage:

Furthermore, Bowman focus group participants understood and appreciate the value of the highway corridor. “It’s a huge advantage for us,” stated one participant. Others expressed sentiments and views best captured by another Bowman session attendee: “Businesses have to go where there’s traffic. People don’t come to Main Street anymore but they drive on highways all the time.” This comment prompted many in one group to press for better signage to draw visitors off of the highway and into Bowman’s downtown business district. “If you are not from here, you don’t know where to find Main Street,” said a participant.

Give People Reasons to Visit Main Street:

A middle-aged participant in Bowman observed: “Young people want experiences. Older people see Main Street for retail and services. But younger people want experiences and atmosphere.” Another participant piggy-backed on this statement by stating: “Bowman (the city) struggles with identity. We’re torn between the past and reality. We have balance honoring the past with being progressive for the future.”

Another participant stated that the museum is an “under appreciated attraction” in Bowman. “It bring people into town. Many don’t realize this. But Main Street doesn’t keep them here.” This person agreed that making Main Street more inviting needs to be a priority along with finding niche businesses that would keep them here.

Scranton and Rhame participants agree with the need to beautify Main Streets. For these participants, their communities’ challenge is to have some types of businesses that provide for some essentials. They all acknowledge online shopping but convenience was cited by most as a priority. “I don’t have anywhere where I can get gifts,” said a Rhame resident. Another participant said: “We need businesses that provide necessities beyond groceries.” Finally, one person admitted: “It’s been over a month since I was on Main Street. I can’t find anything there and I don’t have a reason to go there.”

An issue raised in the Rhame session that was not raised elsewhere was zoning issues. “Bowman County has some zoning issues,” observed one participant whose comment elicited agreement from the group. The Rhame group commented on the “old” and “run-down” appearance of buildings on their community’s Main Street. This prompted an observation on zoning. Rhame focus group participants believe the county needs to enforce and/or update zoning ordinances. Another Rhame participant also observed that “Bowman County seems less active than other counties.” This is in reference to activities and events in the county’s communities. While it is one person’s impression, it is worth noting.

The Scranton focus group talked about activities and events as a way to draw people to downtown. “You need to offer residents evening activities in the summer to bring them to Main Street,” suggested a participant.

CLEAR AGREEMENT

Taken together, there is broad agreement that...

- The public’s perception of Main Street is not matching reality, and
- Making Main Street a destination goes beyond simply businesses, it also involves making it a cultural and physical destination that can be achieved through planting trees and flowers, outdoor seating, public spaces, parks, and outdoor events, etc.

From a planning perspective this is very important and provides planners with these key findings and desirables to consider in the development of the economic growth strategy...

- Make Main Street Attractive: Walkability is priority, public art, gazebos, outdoor seating, and benches were all listed as desirables. Sentiments expressed:
 - “You have to invite people to Main Street.”
 - “Even if times have changed, Main Street is still the heart of a community. People still judge a city by its Main Street and you need to give locals a reason to come to Main Street.”

Find a Niche:

Open up businesses that are specific to the community or offer something unique that will draw people to the downtown business district. This is obviously easier said than done. But participants acknowledge and seem to understand the value of such businesses.

This goes beyond businesses to also include re purposing properties to provide educational programs and workshops that benefit senior citizens and children/teens. One participant stated: “I’d love to see adult education programs offered for seniors like me. Arts, crafts, and music classes could be offered for children and teenagers.” Another participant agreed by stating: “Properties don’t have to just be used for offices and stores. They can also be used for the community.” Finally, a participant in another Bowman focus group session gave this advice: “Look at what’s working in other cities and do it here. Rapid City is much larger but there are things we can take from them.” This comment drew agreement from all participants in the group.

A few individuals stressed the need to reach out to home-based businesses about interests in relocating to Main Street and/or providing properties that allow for out-of-the-home workspaces and meetings.

Finally, the lack of dining – especially a steak house and establishments serving breakfast and lunch – was cited in all four of the Bowman focus group sessions. “We’re a great location for bar food and fried foods,” said one individual who added: “That gets old really fast.”

LIVABLE WAGES AND UPWARD MOBILITY

Residential survey participants identified having an economy that offers a livable wage and upward mobility as what they’d like to see in Bowman County within the next five years. While one can appreciate the desire, defining what constitutes a livable wage and defining upward mobility in a rural county prompted much thinking. It also offered the most animated discussions across all seven focus group sessions.

Answering such questions regarding how to define a livable wage is not dissimilar to defining beauty – it’s all in the eye of the beholder. Another, perhaps more apt, comparison is answering the question: How much is a bag of groceries? The answer is: It depends. So, it is with this issue.

Livable Wages

The facilitator asked participants to broadly define a livable wage and then steered participants to identifying a range of salaries and/or wages to provide further context. Participants across all groups were universal in agreement on four matters...

1. **Benefits are Essential:** Benefits are essential and must be considered into any discussion of what is a livable wage. One participant stated: “Benefits are huge. I’d like to make more but I’m staying in my job because of the benefits. My family relies on my health insurance. We can’t bring good jobs into Bowman County that don’t offer benefits.” Another individual put it bluntly: “Benefits are more important than salary.” The group unanimously agreed with that observation.

- 2. Energy Boom Skewed the Wage Structure:** The energy boom skewed the wage structure in Bowman County. Several noted how the high wages sustained a quality of life for energy workers that was unsustainable outside of the industry's wages. It also prevented some from staying in Bowman County after the energy jobs left as prevailing wages in the county were lower than what they were accustomed to in the energy sector.

It should be noted that one Bowman focus group participant vocally disagreed with this. For them, it was a matter of the county's culture failing to welcome newcomers to the county. Others in the group disagreed. For them, energy workers were transient and temporary and most lived a lifestyle customary to industry salaries. "They were bound to leave the moment the boom ended," noted one participant to nods of agreement from others.

Still, the energy boom's impact was felt on all. Some cited increased prices. Most mentioned wage comparisons. All agreed county businesses were in competition with energy sector jobs which forced business owners to raise wages (and, in turn, costs) while also putting them in a bind for available labor. Participants from the agriculture sector spoke of how the energy boom caused a worker shortage for area producers. An individual added: "Oil field job dynamics are still impacting farmers and ranchers."

- 3. Childcare Costs:** The cost of childcare is a significant factor in the disposable income of young families. Some young parents in the groups spoke on both the high cost of care and limited options. One shared that she pays more than \$1,000 per month on care for her children. "That doesn't leave us with much left to spend," she noted by adding: "Both of us (her husband and her) have to work so childcare is essential."

A generation gap was evident in at least two of the Bowman groups. Some older participants questioned if both parents need to work and if people need to adjust their spending practices. This was a distinctly minority viewpoint. Other older participants said they understood the economic necessity of having both parents working. Some of these individuals shared stories about their own adult children and young grandchildren. Younger and middle-aged participants in all groups agreed that to make 'ends meet' both parents need to work unless – as one participant noted – "A family can live very conservatively and not have much money left to spend on things other than basic essentials."

More than one participant in multiple groups noted that childcare has to be seen as an economic development issue. "You can't bring people to Bowman County to work if they can't find day care," he said. "Many people don't see day care as economic development. It really is. If our day care closed, we'd probably have to move." This participant stated he wants childcare addressed in the eventual growth plan. There was near-unanimous agreement in his group on this point.

The Rhame and Scranton focus groups also touched on childcare mentioning both the high cost and limited options in the communities.

- 4. Limiting Effects of Student Loan Debt:** Four of the groups specifically mentioned how younger individuals – both singles and married couples – are hamstrung by student loan debt, which impacts what they need to get by financially and their disposable income. One individual volunteered that she has \$80,000 in student loan debt and that the amount is forcing her to look elsewhere for work, stating: "I can't go further in my job. I have \$80,000 in student debt. I have no choice but to leave but I really don't want to because I like it here."

Those participants representing the school district and hospital/clinics spoke about how they have to consider student loan debt in the wages offered for starting teachers and medical personnel. One participant offered a specific example as it relates to area veterinary services. "It's hard to attract out-of-state vets or veterinary school grads with our wages. Small towns are at disadvantage because of their (prospective workers) debt load. We've lost out on some great candidates because of this."

Trying to Put a Number on It:

When pressed to identify a specific wage range to live on, various participants stated the following:

- “It depends on what state of life you are in. When you’re young and single it’s the salary that matter. When you’re married with a family it’s all about benefits.”
- “Money is a different mindset for younger people.”
- “It’s all about balancing wants and needs. That’s different for each person.”
- “Just speaking for me, I think a single person would need to make \$40,000 minimum to get by in this county.”
- “You can’t start out with less than \$30,000.”
- “People would struggle on \$13 to \$15 an hour wages.”
- “Sixty thousand dollars is not enough to raise a family on around here.”
- “For me, a livable wage is a wage that provides for a family and still leaves a little left over to save or spend on experiences or things like a yearly trip, a boat, or enjoying a long weekend out of town.”
- “A single parent or just one parent who’s working would need to make \$60,000 to support the family. You’d have to live conservatively on this.”
- “I think a couple with children need to make around \$100,000 jointly to meet needs.”
- “We need to remember our cost of living is much lower than Dickinson, Rapid City, or Bismarck.”
- “The hospital and schools provide the salary scale and steady jobs for the county. Bowman is fortunate to have a hospital. If that hospital wasn’t here, there’d be nothing.”

Even with these varied responses, there were some areas of agreement. By and large, the majority of participants agreed that many adults would struggle with anything less than \$15 an hour, starting salaries must be close to \$40,000, married couples with children need to make around \$80,000 jointly to provide for their families. This consensus – if one can classify it as such – does provide some guidance to decision-makers in drafting an economic growth strategy.

UPWARD MOBILITY

Defining upward mobility was easier than settling on a livable wage. All participants in all groups agreed that upward mobility is far different in rural communities than in major cities or urban areas. An individual in a Bowman focus group session stated the following, which perfectly captures the sentiments in every group:

“There’s an assumption there’s upward mobility in larger cities. That may be the case but there are also plenty of jobs to move in to. Rural communities are different. There are not that many jobs and options.”

Another participant said: “We don’t have a corporate culture around here. I don’t know what people think upward mobility is in Bowman, Rhame, or Scranton. I don’t think it’s realistic in a small community.”

One individual put it this way: “People outgrow what they’re doing. You can hit a ceiling. You can then decide to stay because of your children, lifestyle, or whatever. You can also move somewhere else. That’s really anywhere. We just notice it more in small towns because we know when a family leaves.”

These sentiments were widely shared in all groups. One Bowman group defined upward mobility as steady annual salary increases and/or cost of living adjustments. Another Bowman group strongly disagreed with this. One participant said: “Employees have to feel valued and be given more responsibilities.” On this point a person added: “If employees go above and beyond, they will have upward mobility.”

To this point, a few in the group disagreed. One former employer shared how he cultivated a young man who started in his store as a teenager. He shared the following: “It’s up to employers to help their workers. I ran a grocery store many years ago. I had a fine young man, a great worker who started as a teenager. I sat him down and said I know you’re probably not thinking of working in a grocery store your whole life but there are opportunities in this industry. I gave him more responsibilities... Last I heard he was managing a Wal-Mart, which is a good paying position.”

As this is a planning process, the facilitator asked what ideas could be incorporated in to the growth strategy to somewhat address this stated desire. The following ideas were suggested...

- Apprenticeships and Mentorships: Offer high school apprenticeships and mentorships that will place students in area businesses. A few noted this can only be done by overcoming opposition from the school districts.
- Guidance on Succession Planning: With baby boomers starting to leave the workforce, provide some guidance on succession planning.
- Encourage Buy-Ins and Profit-Sharing: Encourage owners to look at buy-in opportunities and profit-sharing. One younger participant acknowledged you cannot mandate this but it can be encouraged. He added: “You have to be growing or you’re going backwards.” Another participant wholeheartedly agreed with this statement.

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING JOBS

After asking participants to define a livable wage, the question that provoked the most thought was how they saw Bowman County attracting new jobs and keeping current jobs. Some participants initially approached the question from the standpoint of what was most important. In doing so, they were initially split between those who want to maintain and “not lose ground” versus those who believe “if you are not growing, you’re dying.”

Advice for Bowman County Development Corporation:

One business owner believed priority should be given to attracting new jobs to the county stating: “It’s my job to keep my business open... It’s economic development’s job to bring new businesses in.” That view was endorsed by others but not all. In another focus group session, a participant stated: “I think Bowman County Development Corporation should keep working on getting new businesses but also focus on retaining those businesses that have been open for less than five years... They’re the most vulnerable.”

“Selling a Lifestyle” and Tapping Into Technology’s Potential:

All participants agreed that Bowman County has a real opportunity – “The best in years,” according to one participant – to draw former residents back to the region and new people into the county due to the post-COVID-19 pandemic’s mobile economy.

“COVID changed everything, really. People don’t have to be tied to a desk. They can work from anywhere... We now have to promote a lifestyle,” observed a participant who self-identified as retired. “We have to sell small towns and what we offer: smaller schools, safe streets, a slower pace of life,” stated another individual. One said: “Capitalize on what we have.”

For some of these individuals, the mobile economy is one part of a larger strategy. As one participant put it: “We can’t put all our eggs in that basket.” For him, Bowman County needs to capitalize on drones and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). “I just think there’s tremendous potential with drones and technology,” he stated.

Concerns About Workforce and Affordable Housing:

Every group talked about the lack of available workforce. “How can we focus on bringing new jobs in when we don’t have enough people for the jobs we have?” observed a participant. “I don’t know what is going to bring people in because people who want to work can find work anywhere,” said another individual in a separate focus group. Everyone acknowledged the problem is national and appears it will be persistent for years to come. “It’s (inadequate workforce) already baked into the cake. We have to work with it and make Bowman County more attractive to young families wanting to relocate from Denver, the west coast, and who have ties to this area. That’s a group to go after,” suggested one participant.

The lack of housing inventory, adequate housing, and affordable properties was cited in every group. Participants expanded upon this topic in discussions on how to appeal to young families.

Comments of Note:

- “People have to want to be here. That’s the reality.”
- “Being mobile is a real challenge. People will drive several miles for groceries. Online shopping has gotten bigger since COVID. It’s a challenge.”
- “Job security in this area is only really found with government or school jobs.”
- “Interconnectedness is important. People have to be connected to the community. That’s a quality-of-life issue that needs to be worked on by groups in the community.”
- On addressing housing: “If you have good homes that can draw people in.”
- “We can’t forget about home-based business owners. We need to think about how we can attract them or encourage residents to start their own home-based businesses, which are only going to grow in the years to come.”

APPEALING TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Every focus group participant agreed that attracting and keeping young families is critical to Bowman County’s future. According to participants, making the county appealing to this key demographic requires action on all fronts and involving “everyone in the county” as one individual shared. The following is a summary of comments and observations...

“Economics First”:

One individual stated: “Economics first. You have to be able to provide for your family. Businesses and jobs come first. Everything flows from there.” Another participant in another group observed: “Bowman County is appealing. There’s just not any jobs here.”

Affordable Housing:

Participants in six of the seven groups spoke about the housing crunch in the area. Homes are either too expensive or in need of major renovations. Several individuals spoke out on zoning issues, enforcing ordinances, and the need for creative solutions to clear out lots and incentivize new construction or rehabilitation. One Rhame resident said: “We desperately need starter homes for young people and families.”

Quality Schools:

Good schools are essential and the surveys overwhelming spoke positively about the Bowman County education system. More extracurricular opportunities are needed. Some participants shared the view that Bowman has a “bullying problem” that must to be addressed.

- Most, but not all participants, applauded the caliber of local schools. Teachers were singled out for praise by many. Others expressed the wish that administration would be more involved. Some parents in the group talked about the need to offer more extracurricular opportunities beyond athletics.
- There was, however, one issue that was brought up in two Bowman focus group sessions. One participant called it: “Bowman’s bullying problem.” Individuals shared stories about how children are being bullied in the Bowman school system and how the school is not doing enough. One participant in a Bowman focus group said: “It’s so bad, I know a business owner who is getting ready to move his family out of town.”
- Other participants stated that non-athletes and non-traditional students are subject to “nasty bullying.” A couple of participants expressed the view that ‘kids will be kids.’ Both groups pushed back on this. One participant said it has never been harder to be a child than it is today noting: “With social media, it’s vicious. There’s no escaping it.” Other participants said they had neither heard stories about the matter or were unaware of it. One of those participants said: “If it’s bad enough for families to leave Bowman, then it needs to be addressed. It impacts quality of life.”

Activities for Children:

Focus should be given, according to some, to offering non-school related programs for children. Art, crafts, gymnastics, and Tai-Kwon-Do were all offered as examples of what can be done to keep children active. More than one school-aged parent said they’d like to see events for families that “don’t always involve alcohol.”

Recreation:

Almost all participants expressed either the belief in, or understanding of, the importance of recreation to the area. The county's location and its function as a crossroads for travelers gives Bowman County the opportunity to do more in this area. "Recreation has to be a major focus of the plan," said a participant. "There's a lot around here but I don't think we know all there is to do. How do we change that?" mentioned another individual. When it comes to recreational activities, a few want more options.

Specific Recommendations and Comments of Note:

- "Childcare must be a priority."
- "Clubs need to be more inviting and accommodating to schedules."
- "Singles need to be welcomed. There was nothing offered for me when I was single. My only social choice was going to the bar. Now that I'm married and have kids, there's plenty for me to do."
- "Careers are now mobile. People don't have to be at a desk to work. We need to make Bowman County even more appealing to get these people to locate here."
- "We have a lot of opportunities to get involved. People just need to get involved."

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Participants were asked what they wanted to see come out of the planning process. Their answers revealed a strong desire for action and results. While a few could be described as cynical and suspicious – "I get sick of all the talk and no action" – of any substantial resulting from the process, the majority was optimistic. Many were appreciative of the opportunity to share their views. Almost all expressed the desire for follow-up and communication with the public. Below are specific comments of note...

Improvements and Results:

- "Let's maintain what we have and make small improvements as we go along."
- "We need to build on success of the Bowman County. We always look to make improvements."
- "We have to push elected officials to get results. It's not just the EDC, our elected leaders need to step up."
- "I want follow-through. I'm glad we're being asked but I want to know what leaders are going to do to act on what comes out of this."

Shared Vision and Direction:

- "I think it's wonderful to build a shared vision. We've needed this for many years."
- "I want a realistic direction for Bowman County."
- (Referring to the Planning Process:) "We're opening doors for others to participate in Bowman County's progress. We need to remember to keep those doors open."
- "We have to have a shared vision and buy-in from all political leaders."

Other Comments:

- "Elected leaders have to lead. It all starts with leadership and having a growth mindset. We don't have that with our leaders now. They need to develop a mindset."
- "Keeping the hospital open has to always be the top priority."
- "It's all about job opportunities. The plan has to focus on that first."
- "This process is fulfilling an outcome. You're asking us what we think and listening. That's how you can get people on the same page."
- "My husband and I want to stay in Bowman County. Give us the reasons to stay."

TO-DO LIST FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Participants had a lot of tasks and wants for elected county and community leaders to address. While some were negative (this is common in every focus group), most offered constructive advice and had specific realistic requests. Five stood out...

Engage in Economic Development

- Focus on attracting and keeping young families
- “Be proactive in attracting businesses and jobs”
- Be an “engaged partner” in economic development and community development
- Assist existing businesses and offer assistance to new businesses

Affordable Housing

- Clean up lots
- Offer incentives
- Revisit and enforce zoning ordinances

Beautification:

- Make sure “our communities are clean and beautiful”

Capitalize on Recreational Opportunities

Make Necessary Investments

- Maintain and improve infrastructure
- Make improvements to county fairgrounds

Comments of Note:

- “This process is their (elected leaders) opportunity. Use it.”
- “Don’t dwell in the past. Focus on the future.”
- “Invest in amenities and services that improve Bowman County and make people want to live here or move here.”
- “Become progressive in your thinking. See potential. Think big.”
- “Make Bowman County competitive.”
- “Be visible. Be seen. Engage with the people.”
- “Be open-minded.”
- “Talk to the community.”
- “Understand business. If you don’t, then ask business owners what they think.”
- “Work with the Development Corporation, schools, churches, and groups.”





GOAL 1
Retain & Strengthen Bowman County Businesses

GOAL 2
Attract New Businesses

GOAL 3
Enhance Vibrant & Inviting Communities

GOAL 4
Invest in Quality of Life & Foster a Greater Sense of Community

GOAL 5
Prioritize Tourism as an Industry

A Unified Vision for Bowman County