

Date: October 23, 2020

Ravalli County Commissioners
Ravalli County Administrative Building
215 S 4th Street
Hamilton, MT 59840

Dear Commissioners,

As chairperson of the Open Lands Board I am writing to request your help for productive Open Lands Board meetings where our entire board, and the public, can participate. Last night we held a board meeting at the First Interstate Building so we would have a large enough space to accommodate public attendance and follow social distancing guidelines. We had 5 board members participate by telephone. While we could hear their comments only with the stalwart help of Terry Nelson and Jacob Cummings of the Planning Department, those who had phoned in could not hear the comments of the board. It was a difficult platform for participation. There were no members of the public, with the exception of 3 members of the Bitter Root Land Trust.

The Board had a lengthy discussion regarding alternative formats that would allow us to continue meeting with participation of the entire board, and the public. Several Open Lands Board members have been participating in Zoom meetings within other organizations that have allowed progress to continue in a safe environment. I know there are other formats as well. Terry told us you have had discussions with IT investigating alternative formats.

If our only option is to continue meeting at the First Interstate Building, with some members of the OLB and public calling in by phone, it is necessary for us to have access to adequate teleconferencing capabilities. This entails, first, a teleconference account that multiple people can call in on, and, second, a speaker phone designed for teleconferencing. These items could be put in place for a relatively modest cost, and would allow those individuals participating by phone to actually hear and take part in the meeting. This website offers a workable product with a distributor in Hamilton:

<https://www.poly.com/us/en/products/phones/soundstation/soundstation2>

Several members of the Open Lands Board are willing to meet with you regarding the difficulties we are facing and to find a workable solution. Would there be a time we could meet with you?

We do not hold meetings if we do not have pressing business to attend to. We will have a project to consider at a November meeting, so time is of the essence.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sharon Schroeder, Open Lands Chair

Cc: Terry Nelson, Planning Board
Jacob Cummings, Planning Board