





This book is dedicated to all who participated in the Polson Heart & Soul Project and those who reside within the Greater Polson Community.

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PROJECT PARTNER



In 2010 the board of directors for the Greater Polson Community Foundation (GPCF) began asking themselves, “Are the grants we’re awarding to local non-profit organizations making a difference in Polson? Should we be thinking long-term about how the GPCF can positively affect Polson’s future? What do people in our community think is important?”

We asked a cross-section of Polson’s community leaders to help answer those questions as well as participate in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses opportunities, threats) analysis of our town. Their observations were drafted into an online survey. Then “Envision Polson,” a goal-setting group divided into eight grass-roots “action” committees, was formed. We were working hard, but we knew we weren’t reaching enough people.

It was at this point that we became aware of the Heart and Soul Project sponsored by the Orton Family Foundation. It offered a two-year matching grant to underwrite the cost and provide the format for discussing answers to questions such as “What makes Polson a unique place to live? What do I value most about our community?” in each of our neighborhoods. This was a way to reach out to members of the entire Polson community, to engage in conversations about Polson’s future, and to thoughtfully consider the impact of growth and changes that will inevitably come.

This book is a summation of the Heart and Soul Project and reflects the thoughtful conversations that took place during the nineteen neighborhood gatherings and the many community events where Heart and Soul volunteers interacted with community members. I hope the values identified through this two-year effort will guide future decisions made by our city government and the many hard-working volunteers in our community.

Penny Jarecki, President
Greater Polson Community Foundation

PROJECT PARTNER



To The Greater Polson Community,

Polson is a diverse community – from the people who live in and around the town, to the recreational opportunities, to the types of businesses and commerce. This diversity is what makes Polson a wonderful place to call home, yet it also provides challenges. Attempting to coordinate and come to a consensus on identifying Polson and what is important to the citizens, based on the vast amount of interests, ideas and priorities of the various people within the community, was considered a daunting task.

The Heart & Soul Project provided the necessary framework, man power, and follow-through needed in order to help our community identify itself and determine specific values that fully encompass the array of citizens.

The coordinators of the project were able to guide our community through the process of reaching out beyond the typical boundaries to gather input from all those who call Polson home.

The City of Polson chose to partner with the Heart & Soul project so we could find out what is important to our community. Knowing this information, having the values of our diverse population quantified, will help to guide the City of Polson as we move forward. We will be able to make better decisions knowing that we are representing the desires of our citizens.

The Heart & Soul project brought neighbors and neighborhoods together. It spurred many unique and creative ideas. It provided an energy and reminded people why they choose to call Polson home. The Heart & Soul project brought one of the best memories of many people's childhoods living in Polson back to life with the resurgence of the Winter Carnival. The project touched the lives of many of our citizens, and in doing so has provided the City of Polson with valuable information to help guide our future decisions.

Sincerely,

Heather Knutson
City of Polson Mayor



PROJECT COORDINATORS



I grew up in Northeastern Montana and then lived in some of the largest cities in the US before moving to Polson in 2009, a place that I had spent many Christmases and 4th of July weekends for 15 years. Moving to Polson with our three “city kids” felt right. It gave them an understanding of the rural life that their parents had grown up in, it provided them with smaller, friendlier schools and classes, and it connected them to their Montana heritage. I quickly learned, however, that spending holidays in a small town doesn't give a person a full picture of what life is like there. In the presence of the enormous natural beauty that dominates a visitors' perspective and time in the Polson area, it is hard to be aware of challenges and difficulties that residents may be enduring.

My love of the Polson area and my optimistic hope for its future - and for the future of the many people who live here that I now call my friends - compelled me to agree to write the Polson Heart & Soul grant application. The Polson Heart & Soul project was an intense labor of love for more than two years. I half-jokingly compared orchestrating the long series of Neighborhood Gatherings to throwing a wedding every couple of weeks. As stressful as it was at times, it was also rewarding. It was a blessing to share time and stories with the colorful mosaic of people who call Polson 'home'. Heart & Soul's work to discover residents' shared core values has the potential to guide Polson into a prosperous future for all. My hope is that Polson will continue to abide by the key Heart & Soul principles: 1) Involve everyone, 2) Focus on what matters, and 3) Play the long game.

Darlis Smith, Polson Heart & Soul Co-Coordinator

Four generations of my family have called Polson home since my grandfather homesteaded here over one hundred years ago. When I learned about the Greater Polson Community Foundation and their mission to “move the needle” so to speak, I wanted to help in discovering the values we all share and how we might use that information to shape our community's plan for the future.

Two years is a long time to work on a project of this magnitude and we couldn't have done it without a dedicated group of volunteers to help us and those community members who participated. It was hard work, but what made it all worth it was meeting our community members who attended our neighborhood gatherings, workshops and events to share what they love about their community and their hopes for its future. We heard from hundreds of residents and their voices are reflected in this publication - hopefully serving as a foundation for moving our community forward in the future.

Daniel Smith, Polson Heart & Soul Co-Coordinator

PROJECT PLAN

“I feel a sense of responsibility to protect the lake, the area.”

BACKGROUND

It could be summarized that economic-related problems and a desire to work on solutions to them were what led to the Polson Heart & Soul grant application. Polson has retained the essential charm and benefits of a rural Western town, but has not enjoyed the same growth or resort status of neighboring communities. Many believe it is a community rich in opportunity and in the strength of its people, yet Polson has not thrived economically since the homesteading and timber shipping days of the early to mid-1900s. Residents of Polson lead good lives, but not necessarily easy ones.

In 2009, a new and palpable hunger for a more successful and vibrant community began to stir within the community. The Greater Polson Community Foundation recognized a groundswell of initiatives and renewed energy, and in 2010 convened area leaders to form Envision Polson!—a movement striving to help many sectors and groups within the community make improvements in their special areas of interest. Envision Polson!, however, needed resources and tools to engage the broad community in identifying components of and then building toward a united vision. The Heart & Soul grant provided exactly this type of assistance for small towns.

POLSON

The City of Polson occupies a breathtakingly beautiful spot along the southern tip of Flathead Lake, at the base of the Mission Mountain Range on the Flathead Indian Reservation. The largest freshwater body in the West, Flathead Lake draws thousands of tourists every summer.

Economic disparities are a reality for year-round residents, where the household income is about \$20K lower than the national median. Believing that they could change this statistic, residents, business owners, tribal leaders and city officials have recently come together through Envision Polson! to try to begin moving the needle toward a more successful and economically viable Polson.

With Envision Polson! and community members ready to “get in front of development” and desiring to build a culture of collaboration, proactive actions, and planning based on citizens’ values and aspirations, the Polson Heart & Soul project was born.

PROJECT GOALS

- Build successful community collaboration and diverse citizen involvement.
- Apply community’s core values to planning decisions and local government processes.
- Resolve major infrastructure issues.
- Guide land use and development code updates.
- Foster citizen leadership and youth leadership.
- Grow community’s ability to work together, have meaningful relationships, and improve mutual understanding.
- Work in cooperation and support existing community organizations and groups to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.
- Grow leadership abilities among our citizens.
- Mentor and develop programs for growing leadership skills among youth.
- Identify commonly held values.
- Build a vision for the future.
- Use findings to inform local government and community efforts.

NEIGHBORHOOD GATHERINGS

Neighborhood: A geographic district forming a small community within a city or larger community.

How to get residents of the various neighborhoods together: Secure a convenient location in each neighborhood, order plenty of good food, and invite everyone to the party. Send invitations, post fliers, publish the dates in newspapers, and broadcast the gatherings over the radio waves. Leave no rock unturned in your attempt to get a good turnout. *(Did we mention, make sure you have plenty of good food?)*

How to get input from each neighborhood regarding their community values, ideas, wishes and concerns:

Welcome everyone who shows up, and have them sit down to share some good food with their neighbors. Play some fun get-to-know-you games and then divide up into small groups to discuss and share stories about topics like: *"What would you miss most about Polson if it suddenly were gone?"* and *"Why did you move to Polson - or why did you never leave?"* Have participants group their discussions and stories into categories that represent values or important beliefs. Wrap it up with some cool prizes and give-aways!

FINLEY POINT IRVINE FLATS/
VALLEY VIEW MISSION BAY NORTH
OF BRIDGE SKYLINE HILLCREST
POLSON BUSINESS COMMUNITY
LAKEVIEW POLSON WEST ST. JOSEPH
HOSPITAL OLD GOLF COURSE JETTE
LAKE ROCKY POINT ROAD POLSON
CENTRAL SUNNY SLOPE/JETTE MEADOWS
MINESINGER GRANDVIEW/WOODBINE
TURTLE LAKE SOUTH SHORE

FINLEY POINT

“We need an escape route out of Finley Point in case of a fire or other natural or manmade disaster.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

A key value that was expressed in the Finley Point small group conversations was Sense of Community/Atmosphere. Participants at Finley Point saw our small town as having a wonderful “spirit”, friendly people, and community support for all ethnic groups.

The value of Natural Beauty - abundant wildlife, peaceful nature, and beauty of the area – was also expressed. There is a desire to keep these things intact.

Recreation was another value that emerged from the small group discussions. Finley Point participants expressed valuing the community theatre, the lake, and recreational activities. While valuing Polson’s recreational opportunities, participants also expressed that Activities in general, and more specifically Senior Activities, were something they felt more of a need for year-round.

A Healthy Lifestyle was a topic of discussion in some of the small groups, particularly water purification with no chlorine, and reduction of drug use.

Finley Point participants cited Safety and Infrastructure as values. The need to improve access to Polson/off of Finley Point via water and an alternative road route were passionately discussed.



The economy was also discussed at length and hope for improvement was expressed. There was general concern that job opportunities are needed, with some mentioning that clean industry is important and that using “our fruit (by opening) a cherry production processing plant” would be good.

COMMUNITY WISHES

- more employment opportunities - **no littering** - train to and from Missoula - **exemplary school system** and facilities
- **use of lakefront without automobiles** - more events that bring whites and tribe together - more industry - no hungry or abused children - economically solvent year round - **bigger sense of oneness** - Polson the way it is - bike path in Finley Point
- golf course discount for Finley Point residents - more offerings to people passing through in the summer - **a natural healing center**
- better movie selections locally - successful businesses - **a safe environment** - more fun activities for high school students
- **keeping individual freedom** - Chamber of Commerce would hold more events throughout the year, not just summer

IRVINE FLATS / VALLEY VIEW

“Ag is tops – keep it and children on the land.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

The topic of Community/Community Relationships dominated the values discussion at the gathering at the rural Valley View Clubhouse. Participants included a wide variety of issues under this theme. Neighbors helping neighbors and small town feel were the most frequently mentioned values. Other community-related values included land, ranches, home, keeping “ag” valued, and maintaining a clean natural environment. Community relationship mentions included mutual support, friendships, inclusiveness/openness, keeping the Valley View Clubhouse alive, and family-friendly events and restaurants. Infrastructure in the community was also included in this category, with items such as good roads, good county employees (road, police, firefighters, etc.), the need for jobs for young people, the need for development from within the community.

Also included was the importance of community events and concern with the difficulty in finding out about them through newspapers and internet. Many noted the importance of connections to people (strong friendships) and having opportunities to connect with other people.

Supporting Local Small Businesses and energizing the downtown were values brought forth. There was reminiscing of the bygone days of downtown Polson as a hub for the agricultural community.

The Valley View Clubhouse brings people together and is seen as an important part of the Valley View and Irvine Flats agricultural community. Keeping their local community center active, celebrating

the country lifestyle, small town atmosphere, rural safety, diversity, friendliness, respect and honor were listed as values. Also mentioned were cultural activities, history preservation, keeping the history of area alive, and access to a good library.



Health Care and access to health care were values and concerns expressed by these rural residents.

Regarded as an important resource and as a provider of solitude and beauty, the Flathead River received more mentions than the Lake when these participants discussed specific Local Features they value. Healthy managed forests, available outdoor activities, clean natural beauty, healthy lifestyle, the Mission Mountains, our pristine river and lake, and small town life were included in the Environment category.

Independence and opportunities to participate, along with pride in the local 4-H club and other rural activities, were values placed in a category the participants entitled Volunteering.

COMMUNITY WISHES

community would **support teachers more**, and be more involved in our schools - **more agricultural based** - bison sculpture on Salish Point - more activities for young people - **fill the empty storefronts** on Main Street with small local businesses - train County workers to run a road grader & grade the road right - a Valley View Fire Department - **pave the road** to Buffalo Bridge - keep ag alive and thriving - **more bike paths** - gym for Valley View School - repair streets - **more community events**

MISSION BAY

“The city needs to be transparent, supporting business.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

The Community category had the longest list of values at the Mission Bay neighborhood gathering. Participants placed a wide range of values in this category: recreation, walking in the community, cultural events, more pride in streets and ownership to make places more inviting, the need for more quality restaurants, and the need for better quality health care. Participants valued the integrity and friendliness of people here, volunteerism, and the sense of community.

The value of Communication was stressed. Community communication, disseminating information, and more and better communication between city, county, tribal and citizens were listed.

Participants expressed the belief in residents' role as Environmental custodians who should strive to sustain and enhance the lake quality. Participants also valued maintaining quality of life, outdoor recreation opportunity, nature, natural beauty, wildlife, clean air and water, beauty and solitude.

Economic viability was a value mentioned frequently. Economic development, economic opportunities, clean industry and small

business were valued. Planned growth for the greater Polson area and downtown redevelopment were also listed as values. A value placed

in this category but with ties to the Environment category was the synergy of environmental impact versus economic viability.

The value category this group entitled Local Government included good city government, responsible governance, government that provides a safe environment, value of independence and freedom, and value of creative and progressive form of government.

Quality of schools, safety and learning were listed as values under the Education heading.



COMMUNITY WISHES

community acceptance of our neighborhood - a progressive city council - more cultural events - stronger downtown business community - **remain the friendly, caring small city that I love** - more restaurants - more walking and bike paths with adequate parking - **quality of the water in Flathead Lake remains Forever Blue!** - all city council members open to change and improvement instead of a few - lake boardwalk - economically viable community that employs more people and reduces tax burden - city council would **reflect the voter values** rather than own - **active lake preservation**

- streets without potholes and ruts - a hospital that I could trust - more successful small businesses
- a trusting hospital - city council that will truly represent the constituents of Polson

NORTH OF THE BRIDGE

“What is good? Those people who are engaged and give to Polson.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

“What is good? Those people who are engaged and give to Polson.” This statement made at the North of the Bridge gathering captures the commitment that many people expressed having to Polson as a Community. Small town connectivity and sharing were appreciated by many participants. “You needn’t go far to find someone who knows someone you know...and people are friendly and caring, especially to those in need.”

With the greater Polson area situated in the middle of Native American reservation land, the ability to work and recreate with Cultural Diversity was expressed as a value. Recreational opportunities with Tribal cooperation was seen as a way to provide greater access for all peoples to enjoy Flathead Lake and local mountains. The “Indian reservation is a definite plus,” was a comment by one person, and another person commented that if they had to leave the area, they would “miss culture and diversity.”

Outdoor Enjoyment and Recreation Opportunities were expressed as values. The “Lake provides community and open space.” The effort to make Polson a more walkable community was cited as an important step in Polson’s future. One person stated that the “value of our incredibly beautiful surroundings is at the heart soul of our town.” These participants saw Polson’s surroundings as the springboard for recreational activities for the people of Polson and those that visit the area.



Economic difficulties in the Polson area, and the expressed need for a community to provide job opportunities emerged in the gathering. “It is difficult to make a living here,” was a statement most agreed with, as was “the Polson area needs better career and wage opportunities.” Government and its role were discussed. Some participants voiced the desire to have “fewer regulations, less taxes.” They also value representative government and living where personal freedoms are protected. Others stated that they would like to have stronger city commissioners.

The Lake and the Environment were topics in many small-group discussions. The value of “we keep water pure” was strong across and within groups. The value of stewardship was expressed strongly.

COMMUNITY WISHES

expand youth services and opportunities - a better place for kids to hang out - children’s exploration museum/
community center - hockey rink to spark our winter economy - **more economically viable city**, more businesses to
create more jobs - preserve life, liberty, right to own property with full rights to develop same, and pursue happiness - **lower taxes**
- water rights restored - **new sewer treatment plant** - a small town feel - **reduced regulation** - a technologically
advanced and diverse community - Wal-mart would leave so the small town atmosphere could continue

HILLCREST

“The Hillcrest traffic issue needs to be addressed, for reasons of safety and quality of life.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

The Hillcrest gathering participants, young and old alike, mentioned the Lake as important to the beauty and recreation of Polson, and felt it is important to protect the quality of the Lake for family and friends now and into the future.

Conversations yielded many comments about the importance of a strong Downtown and Local Business Development. A strong downtown was defined as not only year-round thriving businesses, but also as having adequate parking, a mix of open space and businesses, safe streets, beautification, buildings and businesses that complement the surroundings, places that bring people in the community together, and places that people of all ages can enjoy. Several participants felt that downtown should be the focus of local economic development. One person suggested that Polson should have economic revitalization zones for downtown, thereby keeping incentives and the community centered on downtown. There were mentions that governmental issues like taxes, ordinances, policies, zoning, etc. should be fairer, more consistent, and better enforced than they currently are in order to enhance downtown and economic development.

Another key theme was Connection with others. Tribal versus non-tribal was called out as a specific area of need for increased dialogue



and understanding, but it was also felt that there is community breakdown in general happening because people aren't getting to know their neighbors. That works against the Small Town feeling that is valued.

The final key theme was Youth. Many participants felt that more activities for youth, jobs for young people, parks and safe inside places for kids to play and hang out together, and an emphasis on keeping kids in school could strengthen our schools and our community against drug and alcohol abuse and other threats to youth and families.

COMMUNITY WISHES

regain vitality Polson had in 70's & 80's - remain/retain small town loyalty, respect, closeness and pride - to prosper and create jobs for our kids so they may stay - **more art festivals** - tribal or affordable fitness program - Dollar store - water slides and art school - road and traffic needs on Hillcrest/Ridgewater - **economic development**, more prosperous community - **top notch school system** - preserve/enhance downtown - technical community college with course work supported by a business roundtable - more kid activities - **city work more favorably** for people, businesses, and potential new businesses, **better understanding and collaboration with the Tribes** - better streets and trails - safe schools - less 2nd-hand stores on main street - **eliminate divisiveness between citizens**

SKYLINE

“I wish we had more cultural activities. I miss a symphony...”

CONVERSATION THEMES

The theme of Community garnered the most comments at the Skyline neighborhood gathering. Values placed in this category tended to group into three areas - the town, the people, and safety. Values describing the town included small town, caring town, quality of small town values, reasonable traffic, controlled growth, and transportation to larger cities. People-related values included companionship, senior citizens, people chatting with you and being friendly, and nice neighborhoods where people know one another. “Mayberry flavor” was one way that the value of safety in the community was described, with particular emphasis on children being safe.

Cultural Opportunities were listed as values by some participants. Examples included Port Polson Players, reading club, artists, and the library; but many participants stated that they wish Polson had more cultural opportunities or offered ways to more easily access to them in nearby cities.

Discussions related to the Economy focused on the need for more jobs and a stronger economic base. “To improve the infrastructure of Polson, we need a good tax base.” Desire for a supportive balance of businesses that fill in the empty storefronts downtown, and concern for the survival of small stores given the influx of big chain stores were expressed.

Education was valued in the context of the small town setting; libraries have increased importance in small towns, and schools in small towns are able to provide the important benefit of being places where parents, teachers and kids all know and care about each other.



Participants listed Environment as a theme and included values of pure water and air, freedom from development, and pristine scenery.

Health was also a theme. Values included in this category were the need for very good medical care for all, and transportation and support systems for those who have medical problems.

The final category at this gathering was Religion/Faith and its broad and helpful presence in life in Polson. People mentioned valuing that churches collaborate and participate in efforts like the soup kitchen and more.

COMMUNITY WISHES

landscape Skyline Drive - **transportation and access to larger cities for facilities** - pave 4th Street near Presbyterian, Lutheran Churches and Linderman School - **improved infrastructure** - preserve the wildlife; scenery; pure water and air - freedom from development - change the city's name to something reflecting the beauty of the area - **eliminate tribal isolation**

POLSON BUSINESS COMMUNITY

“We need good jobs. As it is now, students have to leave to get work.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Small Town Qualities was a key theme according to Polson Business Community (PBC) members, and it included the importance of a community that comes together to help others in need, a slower pace of life, feeling good about sharing of community, and recognition that “people are the most important part of the community.” The participants also included traits such as “the clean environment, ...clean living, quality of life for the entire family” in their Small Town Qualities category.

Business was another main theme category for the PBC participants. Business owners voiced the need to “develop downtown more” and also the need to enjoy increased “support from the community” in order to continue in business. They agreed that the development and sustainability of current and future businesses need to be clean businesses, with good, decent-paying jobs. “We need good jobs. As it is now, students have to leave to get work.”

The ability to keep Youth and the younger generations in the community was a concern. This group also expressed the belief that it is important to “retain Agriculture in the Valley.”



The Environment was an important theme for members of the PBC. Wilderness areas and access to open space were seen as providing opportunity for freedom, solitude and tranquility. These traits were considered important aspects of enjoying life in Polson. It was acknowledged that with this environmental backdrop, there is a need for improved access to Safe corridors to protect animals and people.

COMMUNITY WISHES

- keep businesses small - attract more business to Polson - **controlled growth** - winter activities that draw people to Polson
- road improvement - **stay small town in its kindness** - more variety of retail stores in downtown - good jobs - **more recycling**
- **clean new industry** - more use walking trails - city commissioners more **open to new ideas** for downtown
- make downtown a priority for Polson - **community center** - community to get along to do great things

LAKEVIEW

"I value education for the poverty factor. The key to break the poverty cycle is education."

CONVERSATION THEMES

The longest list of values to come out of the Lakeview gathering was related to Community. Family was most frequently mentioned. Participants also valued friendships, the small town atmosphere, slower pace of living, safe area for kids to grow, and a close-knit community supporting one another. Faith, kindness, respect and honesty were also listed as values within the Community category. Volunteerism, community support, working as a group rather than individually, and specific efforts (e.g., Soup's On and Cheerful Heart) were valued.

Values that participants placed in a category they labeled Culture included activities such as theater (Port Polson Players), powwows, Flathead Lake International Cinemafest, as well as Tribe, Amish, ranchers, and the general topic of respect of differing viewpoints. Participants expressed a desire for more cultural activities, and noted that the tribal community adds a richness and breaks down prejudices.

Improved business activity and quality jobs were mentioned as values related to the Economy. Small businesses with personal customer service and welcoming smiles that provide downtown warmth were specifically discussed as valued, as was supporting locally grown food.

Education was valued among this group - several teachers were present at the gathering – and the general feeling was that Polson has great schools but there is a desire to be even better. The need for quality schools for betterment of our children's lives and futures, community

support, youth involvement/volunteerism in the community, parental involvement, and quality local food in schools were mentioned.



Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains were often-mentioned Environment-related values. Clean air and water, reducing carbon imprint, animal tunnels under the highway, open space and public access were valued. The Recreation category contained many items that were also expressed in the Environment category, such as hiking and biking paths, swimming, sailing, waterskiing, fishing, snowmobiling, sports leagues/events, golf, and parks. Specifically mentioned was "low cost" recreation opportunities.

Government was a category designated by this group, and they placed in it the values of managed and controlled growth, clarifying that their desire for better local jobs must be handled by Polson leaders in a way that preserves open spaces and small town feeling. Desires for government services like road/street improvements, park care, exemplary law enforcement, and library services were mentioned.

COMMUNITY WISHES

rollercoaster - adult sport leagues - Polson to be **a better place for kids** - better street maintenance - more shops on Main Street - **comprehensive pedestrian/bike trails** - no Hwy 93 re-route through our quiet, family-oriented neighborhoods - that the many cultures (people) that live here will realize there can be a **unity with all of our diversity or because of it** - food security - **balance of our varied aspects** - community center

POLSON WEST

“We need to celebrate and have fun together. That’s how we come together.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Three conversation themes dominated the Polson West neighborhood gathering. These were Community, Diversity, and Family.

The largest category of values that emerged from the discussions was labeled Community by the participants. Specifics like small community, caring community, cooperation, working together, positive attitude, having fun together, self- discovery, beautification of our community and propinquity (kinship) were all items that participants valued and placed under the theme category of Community.

Diversity was a topic discussed at length during the gathering, and it also was designated as a values category. Open-mindedness, open communications, affirmation of the LGBT community, and a sense of safety in voicing opinions were all items participants included in the Diversity category. A prevailing thought was that concentrating on what we have in common rather than our differences, both political and spiritual, allows us to meet in the middle and enjoy a better community.



Family - family roots and family connections - was another value theme strongly identified at this gathering. Several participants either came to or returned to Polson because of family roots or connections, and they shared stories about their small town Polson roots with pride and a sense of “belonging.”

COMMUNITY WISHES

warehouse/workshop/retail outlets that repurpose building supplies - **art classes** in elementary school - jobs that would allow graduates to stay here - **attitudes and visions of citizens change** from separation into a cooperative and inclusive focus - *downtown filled with new businesses that flourish* - recycling that leads to Montana made products - Polson had something that made people stay and not drive through during summer - young people **learn job skills** - get Main Street back - Polson would become an **open and inviting community** towards the LGBT community - retain a small town feel yet **vibrant and forward thinking** - not such a political bias in business community - a trampoline - Polson would be a better place - a HuHot restaurant

ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL

“The lake brings people here. The warm, welcoming community keeps people here.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Values relating to Community were predominant at the St. Joseph Hospital neighborhood gathering. Valued were the friendly, helpful people who live here, being close to family, an appreciation of and desire for a community gathering place, appreciation of diversity, and keeping the community a safe place to live. While participants noted many positive aspects of the community, they also expressed a desire to pull even closer together as a community and identify common themes to aid bonding and collaboration as a community.

The desire for a vibrant, economically thriving downtown was frequently mentioned. Participants spoke of a desire to make Downtown more appealing, walkable and friendly. Generating jobs and growing a sustainable Economy for the present and future was noted. “Buy local” was discussed as one way to improve the local economy. Lessening Polson’s resistance to growth and change was seen as another way to improve local economics.

Participants expressed valuing the lake for the natural, clean Environment it provides as well as the multitude of recreational opportunities. Recreational activities important to this group of participants ranged from more general “outdoor activities” to specifics such as hiking, fishing, camping, boating, walking and biking. The fact that recreating on the lake is often free or low cost was seen as a benefit. Free access to all lakeshore parks and a bike path to Finley Point were mentioned as desirable. Clean water and clean air were



valued as important aspects of lake enjoyment and beauty. Increased recycling and sustainability opportunities were mentioned in relation to protecting the local environment.

Easy accessibility to outdoor activities in Polson was seen as having value in getting people of all ages and cultures to join together in Healthy recreational activities that are good for their physical, social and emotional well-being.

Youth and Education were also values. Concern was expressed about the often challenging home situations of area youth and its negative effect on health and education.

COMMUNITY WISHES

improvements in the Polson economy, **community/bridging**, and youth education and activities - collaborate to plan for the city’s future - vibrant downtown, new businesses, and jobs - particularly **providing our young adults an opportunity to work and live** in the greater Polson area - retaining our small town feel, and desire for improved diversity and acceptance, inclusion, cooperation and **less political bias**

OLD GOLF COURSE

“The spiritual beauty of our location does something to your soul.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

The longest list of values to come out of the Old Golf Course neighborhood gathering was related to Community. Participants emphasized the small town environment/attitude, agricultural community, relationships and inter-connectedness of people. Safety, quietness, security, and trust were also listed as wonderful aspects of living in the Polson community.

Dove-tailing this strong small town emphasis was the value that progress is not always better. “We don't need to keep up with Bigfork and Whitefish...and I would move if Polson gets too big.”

Care for all ages of residents was evident in expressions of valuing opportunities for senior interaction and senior citizen resources, as well as concerns about school age children getting good community support. Availability of reasonably priced housing was seen as important. Freedom, optimism and commitment to improve the town “pride” also surfaced as community values.

Environmental issues and the aesthetics and spiritual beauty of the area were identified as values. Participants commented on the importance of the lake staying clean, the enjoyment of local fishing and golf, and appreciation of the Mission Mountains.



Government-related ideas and concerns were significant discussions among the participants at this gathering. Values were expressed in regard to services, safety, security, size, and trust of local government. There were perceptions that city employees need to be more accountable, and that fixing the city's streets and completing park maintenance projects should be prioritized. Some participants desired less government in general - a value of keeping local government small and efficient.

COMMUNITY WISHES

clean, quiet and safe streets - more places to shop and eat - success for new and existing businesses - become the **thriving community** it was when I grew up here - **reclaim its lost heritage** from its founding - better streets - stop and look at what the city can afford before going ahead with more projects - *the pool is self-sufficient* - keep the golf course fence in good repair - **stay a small town with small town values**

JETTE LAKE

“I would love to see a more active downtown with no empty storefronts.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

At the Jette Lake neighborhood gathering, more values were listed in the Community category than any other. Values included an appreciation of diversity and different viewpoints, cultural influences, friendly hard-working people, small town connections, support for one another, knowing people in the community, and the community coming together to help an individual or a project. A safe community - i.e., “low crime rate” and generally “quiet, violence-free neighborhoods,” was identified as a value.

The second largest number of values expressed at this gathering culminated into an Environment theme. Many of the stated values were either about (1) a clean and beautiful environment, or (2) public access to the environment. These values were not just limited to a specific place but included Flathead Lake, local hills, nearby mountains, open space and wilderness. Boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, sporting events and healthy recreation opportunities were all mentioned as important aspects of living in the Polson area.

Quality Education was highly valued at this gathering. “Kids are our top priority – they are our future.” Parental and family involvement in the school system is valued, as well as continued educational opportunities in our local community college.



Economic growth in downtown Polson and Cultural activities such as art, music, and drama emerged as values among participants at this gathering.

Library services, good roads and streets, and quick access to activities (“no traffic,” “can walk most places”) were values that Jette Lake participants included in a category they defined as Infrastructure.

COMMUNITY WISHES

develop Salish Point culturally - parking for RVs - less polarization - **celebrate the culture** of “The Last Best Place”, cowboy and Indian culture, the values of the arts, music, balance, modeled after Jackson Hole with entertainment, specialty shops - **Polson knew and pursued their identity**, outsourcing beyond city limits - keep Main Street going - more support and growth of small businesses - greater communication with the tribes - **quality development of the shoreline** - no freeway or bypass - community center for fine arts such as a concert series - more active downtown - host concerts more often - S&K Tribes and the Polson community could **come together and communicate** - Visitors’ Center with RV parking, restrooms, picnic tables

ROCKY POINT ROAD

“Economic vitalization needs to benefit all.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

The natural environment and the construct of the Polson community were the key conversation themes among Rocky Point Road neighborhood gathering participants. Diversity and the local economy were also themes that emerged.

Many participants talked about the Environment during their interview/storytelling sessions with one another. Comments included: “We need to maintain the pristine nature of the lake and Mission Mountain range,” and “we need to preserve clean water in the lake and the spiritual feel” of the area. Environment comments often meshed with the topic of Family, where sentiments were spoken about the sacredness of the land and Polson being a place of deeply important family tradition and ties.

The second most mentioned theme for the group meeting at the Masumola Club on Rocky Point Road was Community. The construct of community had shared meaning across group members. Representative comments coming out of this group included “kindness”, “friendly”, “honesty”, and a “close, caring community.” There was a tendency to sum up these feelings and attributes as being part of a “small town feel.”



Other main themes were the Economy (i.e., successful businesses, growth and prosperity), and a desire for the community to Collaborate better by volunteering, partnering, active involvement - plus stopping things that “poison Polson” such as the “tyranny of the minority” and “people that sue our city.”

COMMUNITY WISHES

close caring community - design/review committee for Polson - **the land is sacred, keep it that way** - something beautiful in every yard - improved business environment - stop tyranny of the minority, it poisons Polson - **volunteers** to keep the Flathead Historical Society going - **prosperity** - high season commercial venture (Tribe & Polson) on Salish Point encompassing restaurants and tourist shops (think boat friendly) - people who keep suing our City will move - **a shuttle/trolley** - acquire more small businesses to **provide employment opportunities and services** - good steakhouse on the lake - tolerant folks - a boardwalk - more active Tribal involvement for tourist attractions - better transportation for elderly - **peacefulness** - city more interested in business - growth - relocate Highway 93 off the lake and turn it into a park - new signs at both ends of town with foliage - stop panhandlers - **trail system for mountain biking and hiking** - protect lake

POLSON CENTRAL

“Polson has a small town feel and is just the right size. People know and care for their neighbors.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Participants at this neighborhood gathering came up with a very long list of values that they put into a category they labeled Community. While some of the community values were related to infrastructure and services (roads, community center, sound ordinance, garbage cleanup, medical services) the majority of these values were people-oriented. Participants valued the sense of community that exists in Polson and the empathy people have toward one another. Friendly, caring, supportive, and working together to help each other in times of need were words used to describe Polson community members in general. Honesty and generosity were specific valued traits.

Environment was the only other category which received a significant number of value mentions. The beauty of the area, the Mission Mountains, Flathead Lake, wildlife and nature were noted, as was valuing open access for all people and keeping the lake clean.

The need for businesses to work together and a variety of other Economic and Business-related comments were discussed at this gathering. Desires were expressed for better shopping and restaurants, more opportunities for employment, a better tax base, and less regulation.



Values related to Safety included a safe environment, feeling secure, law-abiding citizenry, and safe roads - with Hwy 93 and other local roads specifically called out as being in need of safety improvement.

Values regarding Recreation included outdoor activities, parks, and activities for all ages.

COMMUNITY WISHES

beautiful town with flowers, good roads, and **reasonable sound ordinances** - no burning in town - **fix potholes** - good conditions for our seniors and children and those in-between - community center - *more activities and opportunities for young people/teenagers* - increased recreation activities - **less regulation** - more people involved in programs to make our community stronger and more prosperous - public places would have their smoking facilities hidden - **a cleaner city** - better traffic control - **winter activities to bring in people** - establish something we can keep and help grow new business - time lights to get across Hwy 93 - thriving Main Street businesses - **town jump on the technological bandwagon** - city would recognize there is a residential district - better roads especially 4th Avenue - more jobs

SUNNY SLOPE / JETTE MEADOWS

“Lake, river and mountains are all part of what makes this home.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Participants at the Sunny Slope/Jette Meadows neighborhood gathering sorted a large number of values from their small-group conversations into a category they called Community/Family. Nearly all participants mentioned values related to the friendly caring people, the sense of community and small town values. “We are all one family,” and “It’s important that we work together to make a more peaceful and prospering community.”

Family history and ties to the area were valued. As one participant explained, “We trace back at least to 1906 in Flathead/Mission Valley with many relatives nearby and historical stories of bygone days.” Many valued raising their families in the Polson area, citing safety for their families, and small town upbringing and schools.

In addition, participants valued the western flavor of our community, the public parks, wildlife to watch, scenery and recreation, and community gathering places. “Linderman Gym - it's just a building, but it ties our community together like no other place in town.”

Nearly all participants stated values regarding the natural beauty of the area, the lake, the mountains, clean air/water/land, wildlife, and the rural openness of the area. They called this category Environment.

A need for more Activities/Recreation for kids, and family-friendly activities to keep kids out of trouble, was expressed. This was despite



the fact that many participants spoke of their appreciation of the ability to enjoy the area’s environmentally safe and clean outdoors year around in numerous ways with family.

Economy/Business opportunities and growth emerged as a category. The need for adequate wages to provide for family was a value. “Need more economic growth and living wages for year-round residents, with opportunities that would make it easier for families to make a reasonable living.”

A values category that the participants labeled Faith expressed the importance of church and fellowship.

COMMUNITY WISHES

more vibrant, adhesive community that is cooperative and tolerant - a Taco Bell and Target - **stronger economy** to make it easier to make a living and **jobs that pay more than low wages** - new city council - not grow too fast - parks that are safe for kids, have **more family-oriented activities**, and have something for teens to do - **more city parks** - more beautification projects - community center - **walking path on the North side** - boardwalk and trolley

MINESINGER

“We need to nurture a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity in Polson.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Minesinger neighborhood participants grouped many values and ideas into a large category they labeled Community & Economy. Values in this category included connectedness, people getting along with each other, family values, opportunities to communicate and collaborate to support shared goals, community pride, and aesthetic value (how the town looks to outsiders). In this category, participants also expressed strongly their values of better lake access and pathways to the lake (bike, walk) for community members and tourists. Also a focus in this category were economic issues, particularly job offerings in the community, with short-term and long-term employment for young people specifically noted.

Nearly all participants mentioned quality schools and quality Education as important to them. They also valued innovation in the schools and better communication with staff, administration and community.

A wide range of Cultural values was offered by this group. Participants called for mutual cultural respect and education about the tribes, treaty and sovereignty for all residents – non-tribal and tribal. Value was seen in honoring and cherishing tribal heritage, respecting cultural diversity, improving cooperation and understanding between tribal and non-tribal people, and building more opportunities for positive relations with CS&KT. The group also felt it was important to welcome and use the varied skills and talents of retired people that live in Polson.

In a category they labeled Future Development, participants expressed interest in retaining open space and the small town feel and rural character of Polson. There was a strong emphasis on controlled development and thoughtful planning for growth.



Given this group's preference for open space and planned growth, it was not surprising to also see a strong list of Environmental values, with preservation and protection the predominant themes. Participants want a clean lake and to work for the biological health of the lake; they also want clean mountains and to preserve the natural areas around Polson.

Minesinger participants also listed some values specifically in a Business category. These all were centered on promoting and supporting small local businesses. A “vibrant Main Street” and “keep Main Street alive” were discussed often during the small-group conversations.

Public Safety was also a values category. Fire education, police/sheriff communication with community, and safety in our neighborhoods were all brought forth as values within this category.

COMMUNITY WISHES

economic vitality and creating great jobs for our future - **balanced growth** - sign ordinance - concept of aesthetics for the way our town looks - lake boardwalk - **maintenance of open space** - Polson retain its rural character - no crime - **severely limit development** around the lake - maintain a “small town” feel - provide work so people can stay here - **closer-knit community** - **improved public schools** - Polson retain its unique character and feel and small businesses thrive in the future

GRANDVIEW / WOODBINE

“Sister lake and brother mountains – coming back here is coming home.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

Conversation themes that emerged at the Grandview/Woodbine neighborhood gathering included concerns about Economic conditions, desires for valuing Diversity, suggestions for growing a more close-knit Community, improved mental Health and happiness, and engaging and retaining Youth in the community.

As with many other neighborhoods, in the Woodbine-Grandview neighborhoods, high value was placed on the beauty and enjoyment of the Polson area, including clean air and water, and access to outdoor activities. Similarly, improving the local economy and providing good-paying jobs to give youth an opportunity to choose to stay and work and live in the greater Polson area were strong values expressed at this gathering.

Regarding community, participants expressed that friendship, connectedness and plenty of opportunities to do things together are important. They felt that an engaged and connected community results in a community that cares and is happier.



COMMUNITY WISHES

stable, healthy-functioning families - programs to create high-paying jobs - vibrant downtown - **keep streets clean, neat and family oriented** - more winter activities - more businesses - job opportunities and activities year round for kids so they can stay - block parties, neighborhood BBQs/get-togethers, **increased community feeling**, and a neighborhood walking support system - better roads - prices would go down for food - **homeless shelter program**

TURTLE LAKE

“Polson is always in my morning prayers. I always give thanks for this land and this home.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

During the small-group conversations at the Turtle Lake neighborhood gathering, talk easily turned to storytelling, love was a word often mentioned, and value themes that emerged centered on Culture, Family and Place.

“Culture and tradition is family, and family-oriented is the type of people we are,” explained a tribal elder. “Family puts great value in loving unconditionally.” “I’m home. This is where I am supposed to be. I was called to it. My bones speak to me. It is in me.”

It was expressed that Place has a sacred connotation, and represents a value rooted in history and culture. The lake and the mountains represent a Spiritual element. This element is found in those things that grandparents passed down to their grandchildren; that were taught to them by their elders. Great value is placed on history and spiritual connections.

Related to culture was a value of Cultural Exchange, which was explained as valuing cultural sharing in a give and take process - not a one-way street. Sharing was expressed as a value in many ways, from food to stories.

Peace and Harmony in nature, among neighbors and family, and in community relations was often expressed as a value. Keeping the



Environment clean and serving as an effective steward of the homeland is valued and seen as an extension of harmony and spirituality.

Worry about what was seen as Polson’s inevitable growth yielded comments on the value of keeping Polson rural and Polson businesses small.

Health was also valued, and thankfulness was expressed for sidewalks and paths that allow for activity that is “good for my health and doesn’t cost money.”

COMMUNITY WISHES

more activities for school age children, besides sporting events - **acceptance of all races** - a less selfish population
- **develop a better forum or structure to share skills and talents** between members of the community - **more sharing of cultural things**
- everyone to live together and **to get along** - a big casino - more theater and performing arts at John Dowdall Theatre

SOUTH SHORE

“I came to this area for the mountains, lake, small quiet town and the people.”

CONVERSATION THEMES

At the South Shore neighborhood gathering, a Strong Economic Base was a leading topic of conversation and values. A strong community, a strong and vibrant downtown, good restaurants, and the growth of Polson as a community and as a town were all mentioned as being important. During small-group discussions, one participant mentioned that “strong local businesses downtown would inspire community building” while another mentioned the need for a “nice restaurant and upscale meeting place.” Discussions also included the topic of what would draw people to Polson, with participants mentioning as possibilities new businesses, good restaurants, an artist community and gambling – with caution given that Polson would “need control and a plan.”

The Natural Beauty of the area was nearly a unanimous value, and Environmental Protection was also a prominent value. Participants expressed valuing the scenery, the lake, the serenity, freshness of the air, and elbow room. They like the ability to enjoy the natural beauty without the crowds and water or air pollution. A good recycling program was also mentioned as a value.

Sense of Community, connectedness, comfort, caring, friendly and serenity were often mentioned. Participants liked the small-town atmosphere of Polson, and called Polson “comfortable” and “neighborly.”

Participants at this gathering valued Activities and Recreation for all ages. A walkable downtown and a walkable waterfront with access to



the lake were mentioned as values. One participant noted that the lake draws people and recreation in the summer, but “there is nothing to do in the winter.”

Public and personal Safety & Security was a theme for the South Shore participants. This appeared to go hand-in-hand with values from other categories such as Community, i.e., enjoying the “serenity, security and safety of a small community.”

COMMUNITY WISHES

Bypass 93 - all new streets, sewers, sidewalks - create a downtown Polson that is inviting, walkable and green, bringing in access to the lake - more things for the youth to do, such as activities, places to hang out, etc.

YOUNG ADULT

“Let’s foster people to serve more...”

CONVERSATION THEMES

“Love” was the most frequently used word and the overriding theme woven throughout the small group conversations at the gathering of Polson adults 20 to 36 years of age. This effervescent people-loving group sorted many of their ideas about what they value about or wish for Polson into a category they titled Humanity. Included in the category were feelings of valuing people, culture, religious beliefs and art, as well as valuing positive interactions among people, such as sharing, personal connections, hugs, eye contact, sincerity, being “real”, and caring. Love, respect, and trust were mentioned many times. This group of mostly non-parents was very interested in children and their welfare. They wanted to bring children and elderly together more, and felt a community center could help with that. Additional Humanity category comments included, “Let’s foster people to serve more - turn young folks on fire to give” and “I value family, religion, the lake and children.”

Self Care was the second most prominent value theme among the young adults. A healthy lifestyle, sobriety, family support, spiritual health, peace enjoyed in parks, education, mental health, cultural respect, and physical health were the values that defined Self Care.

Earth Care was the third value theme. Love and respect for animals, nature, land, water and sustainability comprised the Earth Care category. Comments included, “The welfare of the lake, land and children are important. We must preserve and educate” and “Public

lake access and public parks are important; we need to keep people connected to the land and lake.”

Adding some contrast, the young adult’s fourth value was Practicality.

Intelligent discussions, intelligent decision-making, good jobs, functionality, less wastefulness, and creative long-term solutions were values that defined Practicality. A comment in this category was, “I’d prefer to reverse the box store growth. It’s important for the people in charge of a small city to be more sustainable-minded with a big picture vision.” Practical advice was offered: “We need to learn from what other communities have done well, with some balance to preserve Polson’s heart and soul”, and “We need to work together for practical solutions and fairness in paying for Polson’s infrastructure.”

Honesty, Integrity & Freedom was the label given to the final grouping of values. This value centered on a strong belief in respect of diversity, and local government that provides fair representation and is not corrupt.



COMMUNITY WISHES

tribal & non-tribal communities **cooperating in economic & cultural ventures** - a place for community to get together and have **more community** with each other...dances, dinners - **get rid of meth** - better infrastructure, commerce, jobs, goods, and a ski resort - **a boardwalk** - two semi-“popular” bands to play an outside concert every year - Salish Kootenai College used as a resource for the city - **more murals** - a restaurant/cooking/learning **center based around local, sustainable food**

TEENS

“Family is all around and supporting you, plus friends and other community members...”

We began our evening workshop with seventeen Polson High School students by asking them to discuss the question: Are youth valued in our community? Their resounding answer was yes. “Family connections run deep here. Family is all around and supporting you, plus friends and other community members know you and support you. Adults want kids to do better than them, have better jobs, get a better education, have a better life. They care about helping to make that happen.”

Some felt that Polson shows interest in young people staying in the community to do good things here, but that there is a stronger expectation that young people will leave to have a better future. They acknowledged that Polson is an ‘older’ community - not a place that younger generations tend to stay - and that it can be boring for youth and young adults here.

The teens had many ideas about activities they would like to have available to them in Polson, including: more camps available to everyone, an arcade, more hiking and biking trails, a water park, ice skating and hockey, a dirt bike arena, and a wider variety of clubs and teams at school. They also expressed that they would like youth to be included much more in decisions and in opportunities in the Polson community to work alongside adults.

What the teens valued most about Polson was caring people, the natural environment, the schools, local businesses, and Native American and other cultures. They would like to see the Native American culture



more strongly represented and supported in Polson. They appreciate the generosity and support that residents show schools sports teams, but wish that there were more support of non-athletic aspects of school, including the arts and better food in the school lunch program.

Wrapping up the evening, the teens were asked to agree on three most important wishes. They were: (1) Beautification of the city. It will help beyond just having a more pleasant, beautiful community to be in. Make parks better, make downtown better, and get rid of ugly stuff. (2) Put a nice family café or restaurant downtown that teens can meet at and eat good food in a nice setting that's not too expensive. (3) Include kids in finding ways to make school more fun and yet not interfere with school learning. Reintroduce programs like Mini Week, where kids can learn from Polson adult guest presenters on many subjects.

COMMUNITY WISHES

arts appreciation - **better lunch program** - more language classes - different elective classes to choose from - more field trips & club meetings - better disciplinary actions - more respect - more extra curricular activities - Mini Week for the schools - invite **more community involvement** in the school system - more speakers - consider a block schedule for PHS - technology focus - school garden - FFA Club - **more school spirit** - better organization and communication

DR. LEEANNA MUZQUIZ

One of Heart & Soul's goals was to develop meaningful relationships and improve mutual understanding amongst community members. To do that we conducted conversations to get to know some of our diverse community members in the Greater Polson area by asking the following questions.

How did you come to live in Polson.... why do you live here?

What would you miss in Polson if it wasn't here?

What, if it were gone, would make Polson not seem like Polson to you anymore?

What about Polson do you feel is important to continue into the future?

What about Polson would you change for the future?

"Everyone needs to be represented and respected equally."



"The diversity of the community and the multitude of activities are what I love about this area," said Dr. LeeAnna Muzquiz. As a tribal member and growing up here she has noticed that there are pockets of culture throughout the area. "The reservation we live on is different from others because Native Americans are the minority," explained Muzquiz.

She would miss the activities, lake, and mountains the most if they were gone, as most people would. Polson has grown in many ways since Muzquiz was in grade school such as more people, box stores have come in, more summer events, and more perspectives.

Dr. Muzquiz believes this community could use improvement in working together as a whole and come together in decision making. "Everyone needs to be represented and respected equally," LeeAnna Muzquiz said. Some issues get misrepresented or not represented well enough because of not involving everyone and diverse viewpoints. This is one of the most important changes that needs to be made. She hopes that the Polson community will get stronger economically and that people can be successful without having to leave the area.

However, she doesn't want the small town feel to go away. "The friendliness while walking down the street or at the grocery store is really nice," Muzquiz said, "Everyone is very nice and friendly in this community - well almost everyone."



DAVID LAKE

“You have to adapt to change, we all do.”



David Lake's favorite thing about Polson is the location - the lake, the mountains, the forest, the views, the people, and, of course, the Hot Spot Thai Cafe. These are also the things he would miss the most if they weren't here. If the lake, Main Street, or the tourists were gone in Polson, it just wouldn't seem like Polson anymore.

In David's opinion, Polson should be kept as a small town, and not become a big city. "I mean it's changing. It just is with the Super Walmart, and it's got a lot of aspirations but I don't really know if they really fit the real flavor of the area trying to be big town instead of what we really are, which is a spot on the lake. I think we could be way more successful if we were true to that rather than try to be a place like Kalispell." All the bigger buildings will ruin the aspect of a small town on the lake and hurt local businesses. "It hurts them if they try to compete head to head, because you can't. You've got to find your niche; you got to find something that you can do that they can't do." If Polson became a big city, all the buildings would ruin the view of the forest, the lake, and the mountains. It wouldn't be as unique anymore; it would be like any other big city in the world.

"Like anything else, change comes with time. You have to adapt to change, and really embrace the strengths of the area, and try to avoid divisive issues whether it be tribal or whatever. Try to work together and stuff, that goes with anything." One thing that David thinks needs to be changed for the better is the road system. "I would provide a better access through Polson, better roads." The roads in Polson just get too congested, especially in the summer.

"You know, as a farmer I really have to be against growth because it competes with land. Development is our biggest threat to whether we keep farming or not, bottom line, because economics change it so much that it becomes economically infeasible." Growth will also hurt all the farmlands around Polson, eventually causing there to be no more farms. "If the area keeps growing, then eventually the farm usually ends up shutting down from the land being worth too much. "I think any growth in the outskirts of Polson that are encroaching on farmland have a major negative impact on farming."

David is also involved with different events in the community. "I'm involved in the multi-sport triathlon community, so I have a lot of friends there that way, and enjoy that." He believes community involvement in all of the various events in Polson is a great thing to continue into the future.



RAY & DONNA KORDUPLESKI

“Life is good and easier. You just feel good, no hassle.”



Why do people live in Polson part-time? “I love the mountains, the water, and the clarity of the air,” Ray Kordupleski said.

Ray and Donna Kordupleski were living in New Jersey and were about to retire. They didn’t know what they wanted to do with their retirement years. Ray and Donna then bought a recreational vehicle out of Bretzs in Missoula. They called their RV their ‘Mountain Home’ and with the purchase they got a free weekend stay at the KOA in Polson. The first thing Ray said as they came over Skyline was “Oh, my God. Look at this lake.” During their visit, they called a realtor and found a condo on Rocky Point Road that had everything they wanted. “This place has style,” they said. Summer goers are here for the lifestyle because it’s refreshing. They lived in their apartment for three years because they love the area. “Life is good and easier, you just feel good, no hassle,” Mr. Kordupleski explained.

Ray and Donna really love the community and the people of Polson. “They are modern, wonderful, relaxed, interested, genuine and civilized people. It’s really easy to have an amazing conversation with a random stranger here,” they both said. “You can get anything you want in a friendly way and it makes you feel good,” said Donna. They also said that Montana is a no tension zone. Having a conversation with some random stranger in Montana is like talking to an old friend. “The only thing more beautiful than the beauty of the countryside is the beauty of the people,” Ray said. The Kordupleski’s take long walks everyday. One day they were walking by a plum orchard and asked the owner if they could have a few. The owner said “Oh yeah, of course!” and also invited them over for dinner the next night. “It’s a small town with an Americana feel,” Ray explained. When they lived here for a few years they went to basketball and football games. They enjoyed the high energy, the sense of community, and having conversations with people at these games. You become part of a family in Polson. “You’re treated like family even though they aren’t your family,” the Kordupleski’s said.

Ray believes that Polson could focus a bit more on the ambience and the beauty and attractiveness that welcomes people to the town. There are a few locations on Main Street that detract from it. “I understand the need for businesses to advertise, but there are billboards that ruin the view of the lake or other scenery. It doesn’t promote the town. It makes it look shabby. A breakwater system around the town is also needed to anchor and dock boats and make the waterfront more attractive for boaters to visit and go shopping.”



JIM DUFORD

“It’s become my home. I’m anchored...”



Life as an asthmatic 12-year-old boy in Wisconsin was not an easy one for Jim Duford. As a result, Jim’s parents opted to send him to Polson, where his aunt and uncle ran the Hut Cafe on Main Street, in hopes the less humid air would help him. The rest is history, as they say, and included in that history is Jim’s tenure on Polson’s Main Street—seventy years working, with sixty of those years as a business owner. Jim says, “It’s become my home. I’m anchored, having gone to school here and helping raise a family of six children—Val, Cherie, Patti, Dave, Dana and Tali.” He’s proud of the fact that all six of his children chose to stay in Polson and have owned, operated or worked for successful businesses here—a proud legacy on many levels that Jim has enjoyed.

Having worked a lifetime on Polson’s Main Street, Jim would miss the intimacy that he’s come to enjoy at small businesses like The First Resort, Crow’s Nest and Jackie M’s, to name a few, if they were to disappear. He likes to refer to the long-time small businesses on Main Street as the, “Last of the Mohicans.” You don’t get the same service from larger chain stores or from online shopping, he emphasizes.

It wouldn’t feel like Polson to him anymore if Main Street were not here—no Main Street, no small businesses. Jim believes that Main Street America is what makes community. He believes a healthy and vibrant Main Street is essential for continuing the many traditions and events that take place on Main Street,

citing the 4th of July and Christmas parade, Cherry Festival, Car Show and many other events that the community loves and enjoys here. He adds that community loyalty is an important component for helping downtown thrive as well.

For Main Street to survive, he hopes to see a group of young, energetic entrepreneurs with new ideas arrive and help create a vibrant downtown where a majority of the downtown businesses can be open longer than the standard 9-5 hours to accommodate families who have both parents working full-time and to compete better against the larger chain stores and online shopping which is available 24/7. Everyday specials plus affordable and competitive pricing are needed to compete with all the choices that shoppers have available to them. He also would like to see the business community and city government working together to collaborate on issues that impact the future of businesses on Main Street.

Jim hopes that more business owners will offer apprenticeships to young people to keep them here in the community, learn about a specific business and possibly take over when the owner wants to retire. To that end, he has passed the baton to his daughter, Tali, who now runs the operation of The First Resort so he can spend time wintering in warmer climates while the baseball teams are in spring training.



ISAK PETERSEN

“The people are what make Polson what it is.”



The Polson Heart & Soul project took place during Isak Petersen's junior and senior years at Polson High School. As a senior and student body president during the 2013-14 school year, he helped organize youth participation in the Winter Carnival sponsored by Polson Heart & Soul. He also entered and won the Polson Heart & Soul Art Car contest with a design that featured scenes of Flathead Lake.

Isak's parents are both teachers. Their profession and love of enjoying the great outdoors is what brought them to Polson from Corvallis, Oregon when Isak and his older brother were very young. Isak said, “They believed then - and continue to believe – that Polson has a very good education system that they are proud to be a part of and have their children be a part of. And even now that I am making them empty nesters, they are likely to stay in Polson because of the school system and their love of the outdoors, backpacking, small town, and scenery.”

It's perfectly fine with Isak that his parents will likely not leave Polson. It's a place he will love coming home to during his college years and after. “The people are what make Polson what it is,” Isak explained. “I appreciate and have fond memories of so many of the local businesses, and I would miss them if they were gone, but a large part of that is because of the people who run them. I know the local business owners and

they know me; we know something of each other's family stories and possibly difficulties, and we care about and want to support one another. That's what defines Polson to me.”

Isak shared some of his thoughts about Polson's future. He believes it is important that all of the small local festivals continue, i.e., the Cherry Festival, Hoop Fest, the Car Show, the Art Show, and (now that it has been brought back) the Winter Carnival. “Festivals that are specific to a town,” he explained, “make the event personal and special.” He also hopes that locally owned businesses will not be overshadowed by big box stores, stating, “It can be cheaper to buy at the big box stores, but it is also often less valuable in more than just monetary terms.” Another wish is that Polson would build a boardwalk with interesting shops and activities along the southern end of the lake, and have a Main Street with more places to eat and shop. “We are a tourist destination,” he said, “but we don't do some of the things that we could do to take advantage of that.” Lastly, Isak hopes that the Polson community of the future will be more involved in education beyond school sports.

As this valedictorian goes off to study at Montana State University in Bozeman, we wish him well and hope to see him home again often.



YOUTH ACTIVITIES

"I hope that Polson stays the same beautiful place."



The Polson Heart & Soul project would not be complete without hearing from the voice of our youth. We asked students from Linderman Elementary to illustrate for us in pictures and words: "What I love about Polson" and "What I hope for Polson's future."

A few examples of their efforts are showcased here.



Savannah Bissegger – *There's nothing wrong and no trouble. Everybody's nice to one another. We give the poor money because they're kind.*

[I hope] That everyone will be nice to one another and stop bullying.



Kayleigh Burba – *"What I love about Polson is the nature. What I also love about Polson is the dazzling, shimmering mountains. The best thing I love about is all the kind, loving and caring people who live in it."*

"What I hope for the land to be green. What I also hope for Polson's future is Flathead Lake is as clear as diamonds."



Grace Hobbs – *I love the mountains, the lake. I like the idea of the Flathead Monster.*

I hope that more and more people recycle and don't litter to make Polson a better place.



Miriam Allen – *I love looking at the view of the lake and mountains. You may not realize how lucky we are to have that view, until we lose it.*

I hope that we keep the air, lake and ground clean. If not, we'll end up with a ugly town. Which one would you like to swim in?

FINALE EVENT

"Bring back the Winter Carnival! It was the best event of the year."

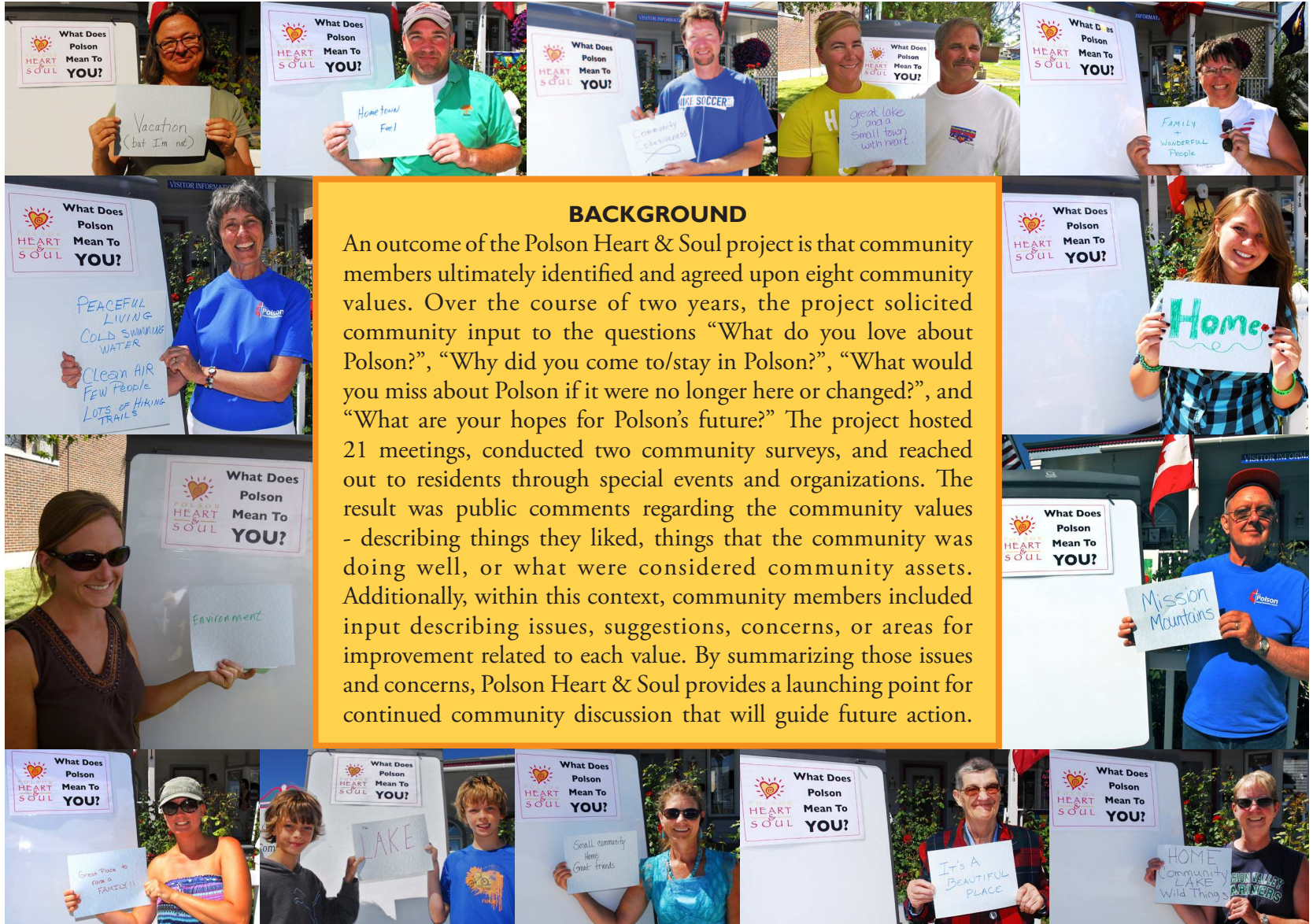


Polson Heart & Soul celebrated the culmination of the project with the Action Summit & Winter Carnival held at Polson High School. During the neighborhood gatherings, community members wished to see the revival of Winter Carnival which had been missing for over a decade. Young and old alike enjoyed carnival games offered by high school classes and organizations as well as food from the Montana & Kid's Co-ops. Attendees reviewed each of eight Value Statements and voted for their top action items. Heart & Soul presented a wrap-up video, the winner of the high school art car contest and a shadow box display that reflected what community members valued.



SUMMARY

“Nothing could make me move. You couldn't pry us out of our place by the lake.”



SUMMARY

GOVERNANCE VALUE

We value an ethical, transparent and accountable local government that encourages respectful, civil dialogue, so together we can build a stronger community.

Governance Summary

There is a high degree of complementarity in terms of the desire to improve infrastructure and seeing that as a major governance issue. This theme permeates many comments and focuses on improved street maintenance as well as amenities for being able to navigate the downtown and lakefront areas on foot. There exists support to improve leadership and accountability in city and county government and to ensure local government works hard for the people.

- Infrastructure
- Representative leadership
- Public safety
- Responsible management of finances/budget
- Recreation
- Services
- Planning that improves quality of life - including trails, infrastructure, resources and access
- Public participation
- Ethics

VIBRANT DOWNTOWN VALUE

We value a thriving, diverse, inviting downtown that enhances our sense of community and is safe, fun, and walkable.

Vibrant Downtown Summary

Much of the discussion regarding suggestions for a vibrant downtown revolves around the desire to vitalize the downtown through reducing vacancy rates and improving the environment aesthetically. There is an expressed desire to fill the downtown with interesting, diverse stores and restaurants, as well as to provide an outlet for locally produced goods.

- Number/diversity/ownership of businesses
- Aesthetics/function/physical environment/infrastructure
- Focal point for community activities
- Incentivize development

SUMMARY

DIVERSITY VALUE

We value people as the heart of our community, appreciate and respect diversity, and practice inclusion.

Diversity Summary

Input for this value was diverse in its own right. However, thematically, comments tended to focus on the desire to bring people together, breakdown roadblocks, develop programs or hold events at which people can interact, and develop venues in which these programs/events can happen. Additionally, sentiment also focused on developing positive interactions between tribal and non-tribal government.

- Bring people together
- Intergovernmental/inter-racial cooperation
- Provide a place to interact
- Growth may compromise "friendliness"
- Support systems
- Attendance at events/sports
- Publish diversity of viewpoints
- Foster ways to breakdown roadblocks
- Need to know neighbors
- Need to be more open and inviting to differences

NATURAL BEAUTY & ACTIVE LIFESTYLE VALUE

We treasure the exceptional beauty and stewardship of our natural environment and its premier features – Flathead Lake and the surrounding mountains – which provide us healthy recreational, spiritual, and economic benefits.

Healthy/Natural Environment Summary

It was clear from all comments that people love Polson's environmental setting. Therefore, it is no surprise that protection of the natural environment is a popular theme as is the ability to access natural amenities, especially Flathead Lake. In terms of improving health, the vast majority of comments centered on the development of wellness centers and an events center in which to hold activities year-round.

- Public access
- Stewardship/protection of resources
- Facilities to be outside more
- Avoid becoming loved to death

SUMMARY

EDUCATION VALUE

We value life-long learning that prepares us for work and life and results in citizens' contributions and community vibrancy through collaborative planning and systemic support by educators, parents, students, and community members.

Education Summary

Most comments related to education serving as a way to eliminate drug and alcohol issues and education serving to provide job training to enhance workforce skills and abilities. The need to improve school facilities and the need for parental involvement in schools and education were also frequent comments.

- Help at transition periods, i.e., high school to college
- Education as a way to break poverty cycle
- More parental involvement
- Home-life to support education
- Maintain standards
- Improve facilities/programs/funding
- Poor attendance
- Eliminate drugs
- Conflict resolution skills

VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY VALUE

We value a strong local economy that provides opportunities for all residents to live, work, and thrive here.

Vibrant Economy Summary

Availability of good well-paying jobs, opportunities for economic development, increasing the diversity of businesses and industries, and support for local businesses dominate the suggestions relating to development of a vibrant economy.

- Maintain basic industries, i.e., ag, manufacturing, resources
- Improve wages/job quality
- Improve job opportunities
- Need/support for economic development
- Need for more diversity of businesses/industry (lots of restaurant comments; more big box; more high-end)
- Buy local/support local industry and businesses
- Education/health care
- Cost of living too expensive
- Maintain environmental quality/Quality of life to support economic vitality
- Facilities, like an event center
- Be less restrictive
- Festivals
- Invest in infrastructure

SUMMARY

YOUTH VALUE

We value our youth, empowering them to serve and grow through engaging activities and leadership opportunities to positively impact their future while building confidence and self-worth.

Youth Summary

Comments associated with youth also incorporate themes identified in other values. Reducing substance abuse is an action item with strong support. Similarly, there is a lot of support for providing more youth-oriented activities and venues youth can go to engage in healthy activities. From an education and economic development standpoint, many participants suggested improving job skills so youth can stay in or come back to Polson to live and work.

- Provide more activities/opportunities/jobs for youth
- Support for families/kids (conflict resolution)
- Quality education and opportunities for education
- Provide opportunity for kids to stay in/come back to community
- Connect generations
- Health/safety

TRADITION / HERITAGE VALUE

We value all the traditions, heritages, and family ties which together unify us as a neighborly community that provides a sense of safety, belonging, and feeling cared for in our daily lives.

Tradition/Heritage Summary

The majority of comments focused on creating more cultural connections and opportunities for the diversity of residents to connect. Furthermore, participants indicated a desire to develop the community in a way that keeps the “feeling” of Polson as it is currently. Although not couched as one of the report criteria, it was striking the number of comments that mentioned family and the history of the place. Additionally, many comments related to the perception that Polson is a “safe” community.

- More cultural information/connections
- Keep small town feel

THANK YOU POLSON!

"We need to celebrate and have fun together. That's how we come together."



