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*Southeast Electric Cooperative, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*

Dear Chair Fitzpatrick, Vice Chair Esp, and Montana Legislature Heritage Preservation Grant Committee members,

My name is Tye Williams, and I am the general manager of Southeast Electric Cooperative, located in Ekalaka, MT. I strongly support the Carter County Museum's being awarded the \$500,000 Montana Heritage Preservation Grant for its renovation and expansion. The board of trustees of Southeast Electric has resolved to support this cause by loaning up to \$2,000,000 through the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program.

The Carter County Museum and Southeast Electric are both long-standing institutions in Ekalaka. The Carter County Museum was Montana's first county museum, established in 1936, while Southeast Electric was formed in 1946 with loans from the Rural Electrification Act. The design of the museum expansion is looking towards the future of electrification, with design already underway for it to become a LEED-certified building with renewable generation. Southeast Electric has already provided grant funds for energy efficiency design work per the MT Universal System Benefits program and will continue to do so as the project progresses.

As a cooperative, we work towards the sustainable development of our communities and believe this development will further diversify our local and regional economy. The jobs needed for construction and long-term staff members will provide excellent opportunities for local MT residents. Their work is vital to Montana, as this museum has toiled for almost 90 years to preserve and learn about Montana's rich history. This expansion will allow more people to access and learn about this history while standing in the areas where it occurred.

Over the last few years, the Carter County Museum staff has spent significant time conducting surveys and assessing the viability of the museum expansion in Ekalaka. This work convinced me and the Southeast Electric Board and will provide economic diversity in our community.

Thank you for considering the Carter County Museum for the \$500,000 Montana Heritage Preservation Grant. If awarded to the Carter County Museum, it will be used to revitalize rural Eastern Montana and ensure the preservation of our rich history.

Tye Williams

General Manager  
Southeast Electric Cooperative  
[twilliams@seecoop.com](mailto:twilliams@seecoop.com)  
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Friends of the Historic Adams Hotel  
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**MHPG Testimony**

The Historic Adams Hotel, for 50 years, suffered from neglect and water damage after the Lutheran Church moved to another location in 1970. It was left unattended until 2000, when Raymond Barry moved in with no heat, water and very little electricity. He managed to evict the large pigeon population and found funds for a new roof in 2006, plus he decorated the space inside with his extensive Victorian Collection. After his death in 2015, a group of people founded this non profit and dedicated their efforts to save this beautiful old historic building. Large donations and some grants have made possible the repair of the foundation, new siding on the west end plus the repair of other areas. We have painted the entire exterior of the building, stabilized the front porch and put in water and a rest room. An electrician put in a new box and basement wiring. We drilled a new well. In 2024 we graded the land in the west end so it slopes away from the structure, added new gutters and had the larger skylight replaced. This has been a four year project. We have had 3 carpenters and a painter with his helpers. The foundation required a house lifting group plus the excavation and foundation team. You could say, the restoration has brought a lot of jobs to Lavina. Other residents in town saw their good work and hired these men to paint and repair the Lutheran Church and 2 other homes in town ,in addition to their work at the Adams.

The Adams Hotel is an icon in Lavina. It was a sad thing to watch this beautiful building deteriorate and move toward its end. It was the cultural and business center in the early years and enthusiasm for this project has been great. Our Open Houses have been well attended. I can't express enough the importance of advertisement in regard to these events. Our first Open House attracted almost 2000 people. Channel 2 covered us twice, The Billings Gazette and the Times Clarion, have given the Adams big spreads. It has been showcased on Backroads of Montana. We also contacted radio talk shows in Billings. What was unexpected is the pride the residents felt for the Adams, is also being expressed toward the town. Buildings are being painted, areas cleaned up. Now the Adams is part of a larger summer event organized by Lavina .The first event was held last summer. There was a pancake breakfast, Art Fair Booths in the Park, food trucks, tours of the three historical buildings on Main Street and activities for kids. It was a cultural and economic success. The beauty of the Adams, looking so pristine and alive, had a lot to do with it. They are planning another, even larger event this summer on June 21<sup>s</sup>.

At this time we don't charge for visiting the Adams, but we do encourage donations. Obviously, we have received some large ones or we could not have done the work we have completed already. We are also so grateful for grant opportunities like the MHPG and others who have helped us along the way. We realize that the Adams

must find a way to sustain itself. We are optimistic .The High Plains Architectural Firm in Billings did a Feasibility Study which included apartments, a restaurant, a few AB&B rooms and some rental space. Also a Special Events place is being considered. We are encouraged by the donations and grants we have received and the excitement of contributing to Lavina,'s economic future.

Thank you,  
Catherine Thayer  
Friends of the Historic Adams Hotel

## **HB 12 – David Strohmaier Testimony**

Chair Fitzpatrick and members of the committee, my name is Dave Strohmaier (S-T-R-O-H-M-A-I-E-R) and I serve as a county commissioner in Missoula County, Montana. First off, thank you for your service and for making it through the first week of the session!

I come before you today in support of Missoula County's and the City of Missoula's application for Montana Historic Preservation Grant Program funding to support critical work on the John Engen Local Government Building, formerly known as the Missoula Federal Building.

This building is one of the most historically significant buildings in downtown Missoula—site of the filming of the 1952 film Red Skies of Montana and home to the Northern Region of the U.S. Forest Service for decades. If you've never seen it before, it's an architecturally stunning building that is part of the fabric of our community but has sat as a virtual mausoleum since the Forest Service regional office moved to Fort Missoula. As with too many historic structures in Montana, it teetered on the verge of demolition-by-neglect until, in 2023, the city and county accepted it from the federal government.

Although the building was transferred to local government without charge, it was transferred under the condition that we maintain its historic integrity to federal standards. But in order to serve our constituents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to upgrade the building for ADA accessibility and do so in a way that aligns with historic preservation standards. This funding will accomplish just that.

Not only will this work directly create and sustain jobs, but the consolidation of local government offices in the John Engen Building will allow for the redevelopment of multiple, scattered government offices in our downtown core for commercial, residential, and retail uses.

In conclusion, we're excited to promote a project that will enhance the economic vitality of our community and state while at the same time preserving an iconic piece of Montana's heritage. The city and county are also bringing to the table \$125,000 in match to the project, which, when combined with the state funding, will ensure that this building will welcome Montanans for another century.

I'm available to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

Dear Members of the Committee,

As a member of the Lavina community, I am writing to express my strong support for the Lavina School Historic Preservation Grant.

The Lavina School, built in 1919, is more than an educational institution—it is a historic and cultural cornerstone of our small town in Golden Valley County. Its unique architecture, combining Restrained Classicism and Stripped Collegiate Gothic styles, reflects a bygone era of craftsmanship and pride. For over a century, the school has not only educated generations of students but has also served as a community hub for events, gatherings, and shared memories.

This preservation project, with a total budget of \$400,989, is vital to ensure the building remains a safe, functional, and beautiful part of our town. The grant would provide 80% of the funding (\$320,791), with our local school district providing a 20% match. These funds will be used to repair and preserve critical structural elements while maintaining the school's historic character.

Investing in the Lavina School is an investment in our community's future. It protects a cherished landmark, supports ongoing educational opportunities, and fosters pride and connection in a rural area with few alternatives for community engagement.

We urge you to approve this funding and help us safeguard an irreplaceable part of Montana's heritage. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to preserving our shared history.

Thank you for your time,  
Charly Tatom  
Business Manager/District Clerk  
Lavina Public Schools  
214 1st. St. E.  
Lavina, MT. 59046  
406-636-2761

Montana Historic Preservation Grant Committee

Dear MHPG,

I am writing to express my strong support for the grant application aimed at preserving the historical Lavina School building, which stands as a testament to our community's rich educational heritage. As a proud alumnus of this one-hundred-year-old institution, I understand firsthand the pivotal role it has played in shaping the lives of generations, including my own family.

This school has not only been a place of education but has also served as a center for community gatherings, fostering connections and support among residents. The proposed grant will cover 80% of the necessary funding, with an additional 20% provided by the local school district. This collaboration exemplifies our commitment to maintaining a vital community resource.

It is imperative that we secure these funds to ensure the building remains in good functioning condition for future generations. I urge the historical preservation committee to consider the profound impact this school has had and will continue to have on our community.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your favorable consideration of the grant application.

Sincerely,

Ivy Mallo

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

As a member of the Lavina community, I am writing to express my strong support for the Lavina School Historic Preservation Grant.

The Lavina School, built in 1919, is more than an educational institution. It is not only a historic and cultural cornerstone of our small town in Golden Valley County, but a symbol of the toughness of our combined heritage and pioneering spirit.

Its unique architecture, combining Restrained Classicism and Stripped Collegiate Gothic styles, reflects a bygone era of craftsmanship and pride. For over a century, the school has not only educated generations of students but has also served as a community hub for events, gatherings, and shared memories. For many, it grounds them to their roots in our rural community and welcomes them back when they are forced to leave because of the limited employment opportunities in rural Montana. It shows how the foundation set here over one hundred years ago perseveres even in the modern age.

This preservation project, with a total budget of \$400,989, is vital to ensure the building remains a safe, functional, and beautiful part of our town. The grant would provide 80% of the funding (\$320,791), with our local school district providing a 20% match. These funds will be used to repair and preserve critical structural elements while maintaining the school's historic character.

Investing in the Lavina School is an investment in our community's future. It protects a cherished landmark, supports ongoing educational opportunities, and fosters pride and connection in a rural area with few alternatives for community engagement.

I urge you to approve this funding and help the Lavina community safeguard an irreplaceable part of Montana's heritage. Too often, our society disposes of its history and I, for one, would encourage you to help keep a piece of our Montana history alive. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to preserving our shared history.

With Sincere Thanks,  
Lisa Carpenter

Dear MPHG Committee,

RE: MONTANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION GRANT

As a member of the Lavina community, a parent, grandparent & former student, I am writing to express my strong support for the Lavina School Historic Preservation Grant.

The Lavina School, built in 1919, is more than an educational institution—it is a historic and cultural cornerstone of our small town in Golden Valley County. For over a century, the school has not only educated generations of students, but has also served as a venue for events and gatherings of the Lavina community.

This preservation project is vital for the update and preservation of this historical building that we are so fortunate to have.

Along with the historic bank building, the general store and the "Lavina Hotel", the school building is currently the only historic structure that remains in use for its original purpose. The total budget of \$400,989.00 is vital to the continued use of the building. With the funding of 80% (\$320,791.00), our local school district is capable of providing a 20% match. These funds will be used to repair and preserve critical structural elements without changing the school's historic character.

Investing in the Lavina School is an asset to our community's future as well as a means of contributing to the history of the town and state. It protects a cherished landmark, supports ongoing educational opportunities, and fosters pride and connection in a rural area with few alternatives for community engagement.

I urge you to approve this funding and help us safeguard an irreplaceable part of Montana's heritage. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to preserving our shared history.

Respectively submitted,

Marie Lehfeldt

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

As someone who works in and enjoys the Lavina community, I am writing to express my strong support for the Lavina School Historic Preservation Grant.

The Lavina School, built in 1919, is more than an educational institution—it is a historic and cultural cornerstone of our small town in Golden Valley County. Its unique architecture, combining Restrained Classicism and Stripped Collegiate Gothic styles, reflects a bygone era of craftsmanship and pride. For over a century, the school has not only educated generations of students but has also served as a community hub for events, gatherings, and shared memories. In a rural state such as ours, schools are an important cornerstone of small-town communities and Lavina is no exception. I, as well as many other community and extended-community members, have attended sports events, bazaars, open houses, education events, and meals at the Lavina School. This is a community that treasures and values its school building!

This preservation project, with a total budget of \$400,989, is vital to ensure the building remains a safe, functional, and beautiful part of our town. The grant would provide 80% of the funding (\$320,791), with our local school district providing a 20% match. These funds will be used to repair and preserve critical structural elements while maintaining the school's historic character.

Investing in the Lavina School is an investment in our community's future. It protects a cherished landmark, supports ongoing educational opportunities, and fosters pride and connection in a rural area with few alternatives for community engagement.

I urge you to approve this funding and help safeguard an irreplaceable part of our local community and Montana's heritage. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to preserving our shared history.

Sincerely,

Sarah K. Bruner

Dear Members of the Committee,

As a member of the Lavina community, I am writing to express my strong support for the Lavina School Historic Preservation Grant.

The Lavina School, built in 1919, is more than an educational institution—it is a historic and cultural cornerstone of our small town in Golden Valley County. Its unique architecture, combining Restrained Classicism and Stripped Collegiate Gothic styles, reflects a bygone era of craftsmanship and pride. For over a century, the school has not only educated generations of students but has also served as a community hub for events, gatherings, and shared memories.

This preservation project, with a total budget of \$400,989, is vital to ensure the building remains a safe, functional, and beautiful part of the town. The grant would provide 80% of the funding (\$320,791), with our local school district providing a 20% match. These funds will be used to repair and preserve critical structural elements while maintaining the school's historic character.

As a teacher at the school, I see firsthand what these funds will provide for our students and our community. With these funds, the school will have the ability to make repairs and maintain the beautiful building we call home.

Investing in the Lavina School is an investment in our community's future. It protects a cherished landmark, supports ongoing educational opportunities, and fosters pride and connection in a rural area with few alternatives for community engagement.

I urge you to approve this funding and help us safeguard an irreplaceable part of Montana's heritage. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to preserving our shared history.

Susan Hayes  
English  
Lavina Public Schools

Thank you for your time and consideration for helpful funding for our beautiful historic Union Pacific Dining Lodge. This year we will celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of when this beautiful building was built. Just this last fall we hosted the Montana League of Cities and Towns in West Yellowstone and most meals and many conference meetings were held here in this building. The Town received nothing but admiration from people over our Union Pacific Dining Lodge, with even more admiration as they learned about the history of the building. It brings a place to remember our history and our heritage on exactly the values of our little town.

We need to fix the roof structurally as it has some rotten logs, and the load amount is low which means we are continuously shoveling snow off the roof in the wintertime. We run the risk of the roof collapsing destroying our Union Pacific Dining Lodge. This has been on our radar for a couple of years now but is hard to plan for financially as we have other infrastructure in our community that needs immediate attention as well. We have now financially planned to start this major project for the roof but are still looking for help in making this happen, so we don't lose our stunning building.

I know the \$500,000 is a large request with so many other projects on the list too, but please remember that any amount helps, and we appreciate all your hard work and dedication to the State of Montana.

Katie Thompson, Finance Director for the Town of West Yellowstone



Good Morning Members of the Committee,

My name is Kari Miller, the administrator of Project 59, Villa Theatre Foundation (climate control replacement) as well as a board member of the Villa Theatre Foundation Non-Profit 501c3 organization. The foundation's board members consist of volunteers with countless years of experience on managing large contracts and projects as well as fundraising. Our mission statement is simple and straight to the point- to maintain and preserve the Villa Theatre. This project deserves full consideration for funding from MHPG to ensure the safety, functionality, and integrity of the Villa Theatre building.

The 1955 Movie Theatre is the last single screen theatre on the Hi-Line. It holds over 300 people and is currently running movies during the summer season (May-August) as well as use as a public venue which has supported a multitude of events which are listed in the written testimony along with public support letters. The Villa Theatre is a historical cornerstone and is regarded as a pillar in the community. It is a focal point to come together for entertainment, celebrations, mourning and even broadcasting music during the events (annual car cruise, 9/11 memorial, holiday music).

Our proposal is for the replacement of a commercial climate control system which will allow year round access to the public. The project will utilize local contractors and HVAC technicians, along with the professional support of local utilities- promoting economic stimulus throughout the project as well as support employment year round after the completion of the project.

As many of us probably know already, Montana is riddled with rural towns and 'middle of nowhere, and the city of Malta is no exception. However, the Villa Theatre is at the helm for community gatherings and events to support tourism and promote a positive local economy. Our agenda of planned 2025 events is also noted in our written testimony for your review- but would like to highlight the short film that was shot in Phillips County (Daughter of the Plain) including the theatre. We will again welcome open arms to the director, actors and crew for a free community showing of 'Daughter of the Plains' this spring.

#### Update on secured funding

Radio-A-Thon= \$2000

Holiday Shop= \$250

Direct Donations= \$1500

Pledge for 1:1 Matching Donation by Local Disabled Veteran

Personal Funds up to \$25,000 to ensure grant matching is secured

Contractor has pledged to provide \$33,333 worth of professional services



## Project 59, Villa Theatre Foundation, Climate Control for Villa Theatre

Below are the words from some of the community members regarding their experience at the theatre and the community impact events and support we have received.

Community Members provided responses to a survey that asked for them to share their Villa Theatre experience. (Survey completed in October 2023)

### **Tell us about your experience of the Villa and it's importance to Malta, MT.**

The matinee and Halloween night

My grandparents built it

Went as a kid my mom worked there. Love taking my grands

The excitement of hearing the pre movie music blasting from the outdoor speaks.

Remember going to the movie for a quarter, Saturday matinees.

Working at the Villa Theater was my first job. Started when I was an 8th grader and worked until my Junior year of High school! Pay was \$1.50 an hour for ticket taker and usher. \$2.00 a hour for the candy counter. Carl and Irene Veseth were the owners. Lynn Lamb was the manager. This was the years of 1973-1975. Wednesday night was take a chance night. Tickets were .50 cents. Usually a old movie, or not very rated good! One memory that sticks in my mind. Lynn Lamb had started getting in R or x rated movies and the ladies from the Catholic Church and maybe other churches Started picking outside the theater to try and ban these movies. I remember hiding in the back seat of the car, because I didn't want to be recognized because I worked there. Luckily I was scheduled off that night.

My first job was at Villa Theater when I was 10 years old. Mrs Pancake owned it

Great place to grow up. Carl and Irene Veseth used to bring you on stage at intermission ands the whole crowd sang happy birthday. You also received a free admission ticket on your birthdays. It was the place to be and go during the 60s and 70s. Lots of good timers there.

I was born and raised in Phillip's County and have watched many a movie in this theater. My son helped take out the old seats a few years ago also.

My family enjoyed quite a few holidays in the home upstairs. My siblings and I spent endless hours exploring every nook and cranny. I have so many wonderful memories in that building.



## Project 59, Villa Theatre Foundation, Climate Control for Villa Theatre

### Previous Community Events:

- Community Mural (Grant and Donations/In-Kind Funded)
- Suicide Prevention Ribbons displayed on site “Villa Lawn” area in front of Mural
- ‘22 A Day is 22 too many’ On Marquee for Veteran Suicide Awareness
- Broadcast KMMR during car cruise
- Provided tours of the film/projector room with memorabilia to schools and to visitors
- ‘Daughter of the Plain’ short film used building for production purposes
- Dino Days- showed Jurassic Park 30 year anniversary of the first movie released
- Football team used theatre to watch ‘film’ and team meeting
- Donated tickets to headstart, boys and girls club and Malta Opportunities Inc (for persons with disabilities)
- End of the school year movie for entire elementary school
- Knight of Columbus sponsored movie Father Stu
- Dodson School sponsored movie Killer of the moon Flowers (after they had read the book in class)
- Donated Kids Admission Tickets to the Garden Club Farmer’s Market

### Upcoming Schedule of Events:

- Spring Cleaning
- Re-Opening Day
- Easter Event- Passion of the Crist (sponsored by Assembly of God Church)
- Showing ‘Daughter of the Plain’ release party
- New Release Movies Fri-Sat-Sun 2pm and Friday-Sat 7pm starting in Summer
- Broadcast KMMR for the Annual Classic Car Cruise
- Summer Movie Series- Wednesdays for 8 weeks (Kids Club and Head Start free admission)
- Dino Days- free movie pass for kids attendance of Dino Days
- Comedy Show
- 9/11 Memorial- patriot music broadcasted
- Holiday Movie- sponsored by First State Bank of Malta



### **Project 59, Villa Theatre Foundation, Climate Control for Villa Theatre**

Additional Information:

F-5 Construction (Malta resident and local carpenter) has pledged to donate \$33,333 worth of labor and services to this project. Owner name is Elijah Faydo (EJ) Cell: 406-301-4060 Email: [efaydo@gmail.com](mailto:efaydo@gmail.com)

## **Written Testimony: Montana Historic Preservation Grant Program – Yellowstone Art Museum**

Mister Chairman, members of the committee, for the record, my name is Jessica Ruhle Ogdin. I am the Deborah Anspach & John Hanson Executive Director of the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings. I am testifying on behalf of our grant application which details the need for roof repair.

In 2024, we celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was a year full of gratitude and celebration, but it wasn't free of challenges. Our historic building requires careful and constant stewardship. The roof that covers the oldest portion of our building is damaged and leaking, and we must make repairs to ensure our infrastructure is up-to-date.

We are a contemporary art museum with a desire to engage people deeply familiar with the visual arts, as well as those experiencing a museum for the first time. We inspire creativity and provide access to art education for all ages—from young children to seniors and everyone in between.

Last year alone, our education programs served more than 8,500 students, and it's uplifting to hear these efforts are making an impact on others' lives. Chandra Brown, a local parent, had this to say about her child's experience at our summer camp: "Art camp is my daughter's **favorite** week of the year—more than Christmas or her birthday. She says, 'Mom, I found my people.'"

Additionally, we are an important part of the local economy. Located in downtown Billings, the YAM serves as a revenue generator for the City of Billings and Yellowstone County. In addition to our role as an employer, we welcomed 17,000 guests to downtown Billings in 2024. Our audience is a mix of locals and traveling visitors. We received this feedback from one of our guests: "I could buy groceries in Cody, but I come [to Billings] to eat, shop, and play. The YAM is **always** part of my trip."

The YAM is part of the cultural vibrancy of the city and broader region. With other organizations, we create a cultural network that allows major employers—the hospitals, banks, and so many others—to bring and retain employees in Eastern Montana.

In my time as director, unrestricted access to our museum and its programs has been a guiding principle. Since October 2023, we offer free admission to everyone who walks through our doors. In our first six months of free admission, we saw more than 300% increase in YAM visitors. The largest increase was seen in visiting families. We are proud of making the museum available to more people, and it takes the work and passion of more than 20 staff members and 70 volunteers to provide that level of access.

It also requires buildings and grounds that can safely accommodate growing visitation, daily operations, and the well-being of our collection and displayed works.

Thankfully, the process of repairing our roof would not impact our current operations whatsoever. Visitors would still have access the entirety of the museum.

Thank you for your time and support, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.