

SB 2018
Letter of Support

Hello Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the committee. My name is Patti Larson, and I'm the chair of Sheyenne GRIT. I think fully funding rural grants through the Department of Commerce is money well spent. Sheyenne is proof that a small investment has big impact in rural North Dakota.

Sheyenne GRIT is a community development non-profit run by volunteers addressing six areas of need in Sheyenne, North Dakota. Our top priority is housing. The timing and purpose of the Rural Workforce Housing Grant last year was spot on. Small towns have little to no money to fund community development. GRIT had used Creative Community Solutions funds and volunteers to buy and renovate a house and planned to use the profit from the sale of that first house to purchase and tear down one of the properties in town that was beyond repair. We hoped to get one house renovated and sold and one dilapidated house torn down about every two years. Then we heard about the Rural Workforce Housing Grant. The grant allowed us to clean up three dilapidated properties in one week and invest the house sale profit directly into the next house rehab. This greatly accelerated Sheyenne's path to housing availability.

We know that the demand is there. Seven parties from five different states wanted to buy the first renovated house, and it sold for asking price. The Workforce Housing Grant funded the demo and clean up of the blighted house GRIT replaced by moving a donated ranch style house in to renovate and sell. Several people were expressing interest in the other city lot cleared by the grant, so we are now considering proposals from people who want to build their new home in Sheyenne.

It just makes sense to invest in rural infill housing. All the infrastructure is in place, including fiber optic internet, a 5G cell tower, MDU, sewer, garbage collection, and good clean water. The quality of small town living is exemplary. For these reasons and many more, young professionals who work remotely are choosing to find the good life in rural North Dakota.

Sheyenne still has 18 houses that are not homes. They hold no residents, only things, and are not on the market. Our community is determined to make these modest houses move-in ready and put them up for sale. Future projects also include rehabilitating a six unit apartment building with currently only two livable units and making upgrades to the Open Season Lodge so that we can house 70 wind project workers. We need room for more workers now, and these projects will benefit our community for years to come. Think of all the small towns across the state with dedicated volunteers setting goals for the future of their community. Investing in the Department of Commerce grant program will make these goals a reality for rural North Dakota.

Sincerely,
Patti Jo Larson
Sheyenne GRIT
Sheyenne, ND