

SB 2097
Letter of Support

Dear Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Sandra Larson and I am a proud volunteer for the community of Sheyenne, North Dakota. I strongly support SB 2097 as written.

I was taught to volunteer for my community as soon as I was old enough to pour coffee at a fundraiser. Now, as a civil engineer working on community projects across the region, I know the value of growing up in a small town. I would love to move back home one day, but there is currently nothing for sale or rent in Sheyenne, with a mighty population of 178. Instead I spend my spare time writing grants on behalf of Sheyenne GRIT, a non-profit focused on six aspects of community betterment. Our main focus is housing. Projects the people of Sheyenne have been dreaming of for a generation were made possible by the Rural Workforce Housing Grant and Rural Slum and Blight Removal Grant from the Department of Commerce, for which we competed against towns with populations of 10,000 or less. An endowment fund to benefit towns of 1,000 or less would create opportunities for 344 communities (86% of towns in North Dakota) and volunteers would no longer have to compete with cities that have grant writers and administrators working in paid positions.

With \$117,300 from two Department of Commerce grants, we have torn down five dilapidated structures, moved in a donated three bedroom home, put a new roof on an essential business, are restoring an apartment building, and are offering a free lot for building a new home in a prime location. It just makes sense to invest in infill housing. All the infrastructure is already in place, including fiber optic internet that makes working from home in professions like mine possible. GRIT also uses a community-owned finance tool that started with a "seed-money" grant from StrengthenND. We have already bought, renovated, and sold a house and are working on our second with the profit from the first sale. This proves that an initial investment can turn into a self-sustaining project. It's not only giving our community a facelift, it's expanding the tax base, and five of seven families interested in building a home or moving to Sheyenne are from out of state! We are working to create workforce housing availability and the Department of Commerce and other rural grants are making that possible.

The hard working people who make up the Department of Commerce select projects that put rural communities on the path to growth and resiliency. The grant application process is strict, and each expense is scrutinized. Not a penny is wasted, and the grant projects we do in Sheyenne invest the funds right back into our community whenever possible, supporting local contractors, the hardware store, and lumber yard. 93% of our Rural Workforce Housing Grant money stayed in Eddy County. Thank you for investing in rural North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Sandra Larson
Sheyenne GRIT
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