



SISTERS COUNTRY HORIZONS DRAFT VISION STRATEGIES

**Based on
Community Interviews & Community Input Reports**

**Vetted & Refined at Four Community Forums
(May 31, June 4, 12 & 18, 2018)**

**Sisters Country Horizons – Our Community Vision
City of Sisters, Oregon
July 2018**

**Prepared by Steven Ames & Ruth Williamson
NXT Consulting Group • Bend | Portland, Oregon**



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

In May and June 2018, **Sisters Country Horizons**, a visioning project sponsored by the City of Sisters in partnership with Deschutes County and Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, conducted a series of community forums as part of a comprehensive public engagement process.

Working with input developed from the project's Community Interviews, an Online Community Survey, a number of local community meetings, and other sources of community input, the forums reviewed and refined a series of strategies for potential inclusion in the **Sisters Country Horizons Vision and Action Plan**.

Four Community Forums were held, each reflecting one of four identified vision focus areas:

- **Connected Sisters**, Sisters High School, May 31;
- **Prosperous Sisters**, Aspen Lakes, June 4;
- **Livable Sisters**, Sisters City Hall, June 12; and
- **Resilient Sisters**, Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire Hall, June 18.

Sisters Country Horizons Vision Focus Areas



Approximately 120 residents of Sisters Country participated in the forum events. Each forum also featured local experts from the community, who presented their perceptions on future challenges and opportunities for Sisters Country. The forums were planned and facilitated by Steven Ames and Ruth Williamson of NXT Consulting Group, consultant to the visioning project.

At each forum participants heard about community input to date, received background information and data on their forum topic, discussed "critical choices" for their focus area, and reviewed and refined a draft set of strategies based on community input. In a straw poll, participants also identified their "top pick" strategies.

This report presents the final draft strategies resulting from the forums. There are 54 strategies in all, incorporating suggested changes offered by forum participants. While several strategies were merged due to their similar focus, and a few were moved to different focus areas, overall they closely reflect forum participants' recommendations.

These strategies will be now tested for their priority with the wider public in an **Online Community Survey II** conducted in July and August. Ultimately, the top priority strategies will be included in a Vision Statement to be presented to the community at a **Vision Summit** on October 4. (See www.sistershorizons.org for announcements on this event.) From there, the final strategies will become the basis of the Vision Action Plan developed by a Vision Action Team comprised of community members. (Strategies that do not make the final plan, will be identified and catalogued for possible future implementation.)

Sisters Country Horizons would like to thank the **City of Sisters, Deschutes County and Central Oregon Intergovernmental County** for their assistance in planning and staging the forums, and the four forum venues for the use of their facilities and refreshments. We also would like to thank the local experts who presented at the forums (see roster below). Finally, we would like to thank the scores of participants at the forums who played a major role in helping bring the Sisters Country Vision and Action Plan to life.

Connected Sisters

- **Amy Burgstahler**, Citizens4Community
- **Bob Collins**, Sisters Science Club
- **Ruth Jones**, OSU *Juntos* Coordinator
- **Chuck Ryan**, Mayor, City of Sisters
- **Sue Stafford**, The Nugget, Sisters Historical Society

Prosperous Sisters

- **Scott Aycock**, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
- **Caprielle Foote-Lewis**, Economic Development for Central Oregon (EDCO)
- **Emily Rickards**, Owner, The Open Door restaurant

Livable Sisters

- **Brad Chalfant**, Deschutes Land Trust
- **Patrick Davenport**, City of Sisters Community Development Department
- **Nick Lelack**, Deschutes County Community Development Department
- **Steve Swisher**, Deschutes County Planning Commission
- **Sharlene Weed**, Habitat for Humanity

Resilient Sisters

- **Paul Garrison**, Deschutes Country Sheriff
- **Roger Johnson**, Fire Chief, Sisters Camp Sherman Fire District
- **Ian Reid**, District Ranger, Sisters District U.S. Forest Service
- **Mandee Seely**, homeless advocate

CONNECTED SISTERS

- 1. Small-Town Atmosphere.** Promote the small-town atmosphere and friendly vibe of Sisters Country as the city and region grow, increasing outreach and opportunities for face-to-face contacts, neighbor-to-neighbor cooperation, and visitors-to-locals connections and commerce.
- 2. Official 'Welcoming City'.** Secure designation of the City of Sisters as an official 'Welcoming City' by Welcoming America, committed to creating a welcoming community climate and ensuring the long-term economic and social integration of newcomers.
- 3. Vision Plan Implementation.** Promote implementation of the Sisters Country Horizons Vision and Action Plan, including formation of an ongoing Vision Implementation Committee representing key public, private and civic stakeholders identified as lead partners in the plan. **(★Top Pick, Forum Participants)**
- 4. Managing Conflict in the Public Realm.** Form a partnership between public agencies, Citizens4Community, local experts and others to develop new approaches to better manage major disagreements in the public realm and to help avoid "hot topics" from becoming outright conflicts.
- 5. Regional Communications Hub.** Develop a regional information and communication 'hub', coordinating improved outreach and communication of local government and public agencies in Sisters Country, including alignment of major plans and initiatives.
- 6. New Leadership Training & Development.** Develop a deeper pool of leadership, including qualified candidates for public offices, boards and commissions in Sisters Country, through skill building in public administration, policy and planning, budgeting, civil dialogue, decision-making, and related capacities.
- 7. Young Adult Participation in Public Affairs.** Develop a comprehensive initiative to foster greater participation of young adults in Sisters Country, including representation on City boards, commissions and committees, and other public entities.
- 8. Opportunities for Millennials & iGens.** Create opportunities for Millennials and iGens (a.k.a. "Generation Z") to remain in and contribute to community life, including employment, affordable housing options, and cultural and recreational attractions.
- 9. Diversity & Inclusion.** Bring Sisters Country's less frequently heard voices into a more diverse, welcoming and inclusive community conversation, fostering greater tolerance in the community helping newcomers as well as long-time residents to feel valued and supported. **(★Top Pick, Forum Participants)**
- 10. School Enrollments.** Support Sisters School District in its efforts to increase school enrollments, keeping local students in the District and serving Sisters Country families and the wider community.

- 11. Educational Innovation in Schools.** Support the innovative curriculum, unique programming, community-based initiatives, and year-round use of existing facilities of Sisters School District, bolstering the district as the "hub of the community" and connecting its students to the community and beyond. **(★Top Pick, Forum Participants)**
- 12. Sisters Country Volunteer Corps.** Explore new ways to revitalize the Sisters Country volunteer sector as a foundation of the community, fostering development of a corps of people with time, expertise or passion to contribute, coordinating opportunities for them to give back to the community.
- 13. Multi-Purpose Community Center.** Plan, finance and develop a multi-purpose community center in Sisters, featuring year-round programming and opportunities for community members of all ages and abilities to gather and connect, take part in healthy recreation and exercise, and participate in classes, arts, lectures, and community events. **(★Top Pick, Forum Participants)**
- 14. Discovery Center & Museum.** Develop a Sisters Country Discovery Center & Museum that welcomes, informs and educates visitors and locals alike on the rich history and traditions of Sisters Country.

PROSPEROUS SISTERS

- 1. Oregon's Artisanal Capital.** Develop and promote Sisters Country as the "Artisanal Capital of Oregon", building on its strategic location and spectacular environment, expanding the artisanal economy including visual artists, trades and crafts people, musicians, performance artists, writers, brewers, distillers, and farm-to-table chefs.
- 2. Four-Season Tourist Destination.** Strategically develop Sisters Country's year-round tourism and destination economy, increasing the number of shoulder season and winter events and attractions, such as performances, festivals, and outdoors sports tournaments. **(★Top Pick, Forum Participants)**
- 3. Outdoor Recreational 'Mecca'.** Cultivate Sisters Country's reputation as an outdoor recreation mecca with easy access to the Cascades and adjacent wilderness areas, expanding into new recreational niches including ecotourism, aviation tourism, guided outdoor adventures and peak trips, heli-skiing, and yurts for backcountry skiing.
- 4. Sisters Makers District.** Develop and promote a Sisters "Makers District" in Sisters, where metal crafts, woven crafts, pottery, and arts studios mix with restaurants, coffee houses and craft brew pubs, creating a pedestrian-friendly zone that compliments and expands existing retail on Cascade and Hood avenues.
- 5. Arts & Crafts Retreat Center.** Consider and support a world-class arts and crafts retreat center, attracting leading practitioners and students to study, learn and practice in a working setting that honors the environment, culture and values of Sisters Country.

6. **Forest Service Property Development.** Develop a masterplan for a signature development on the U.S. Forest Service property that is compatible with the community's character and identity, combining mixed-used commercial, residential and recreational facilities that anchor and define the community, create new jobs, and provide housing options. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
7. **Entrepreneurial Infrastructure.** Develop infrastructure to nurture and support entrepreneurial initiatives in Sisters Country, such as start-up companies and new business ventures, including "live-work" housing, "co-working" spaces, business incubators, and technology support services. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
8. **Comprehensive Broadband & Internet.** Ensure fast, comprehensive, high-quality broadband and Internet access for all of Sisters Country, identifying service gaps and substandard service areas and working with public and private sector interests to address them. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
9. **Sisters-Compatible Light Industrial.** Promote development of new light industrial square footage for lease in Sisters, focusing on recruitment of companies that build on or expand established or emerging industrial sectors and which fit the community's culture and vision for its future economy. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
10. **Vocational Education & Workforce Development.** Working with Sisters High School and other vocational education and training resources in Central Oregon, create new courses, workplace experiences and apprenticeships to develop and train Sisters Country's emerging workforce.
11. **Home-Based Businesses.** Building on Sisters Country's high quality of life and ability to attract entrepreneurial residents with potential to work from home, support the establishment and success of legitimate, permitted home-based businesses and occupations in Sisters Country.
12. **Thriving Agricultural Economy.** Support the continued viability of a diversified agricultural economy in Sisters Country, including livestock and hay farming, and the legacy economy that provides the equipment and services its requires.
13. **Sisters Country Agritourism.** Explore new and innovative forms of agritourism in Sisters Country that link the area's rural ranches and farms with its arts, crafts and recreational economy, creating unique experiences for visitors to appreciate and participate in rural ranching and farming life.

LIVABLE SISTERS

1. **Sisters Country Livability Forum.** Working through Citizen4Community, conduct bi-annual public forums to address Sisters Country's continued livability, exploring such topics as growth and planning, economic development, housing, transportation, infrastructure, and quality of life. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)

2. **Planning for Future Growth.** Working through City and County comprehensive planning, explore options for future growth and development in Sisters. Identify target areas for new or infill residential, commercial and industrial development, and multi-modal transportation connections. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
3. **Compatible Employment Sites.** Working through Economic Development for Central Oregon (EDCO), attract companies for existing light industrial and similar employment sites in Sisters, focusing on small-to-medium sized companies that build on established or emerging sectors and are compatible with the community's character and identity.
4. **Affordable Housing.** Increase the availability of affordable housing in Sisters Country, including a comprehensive review of the Sisters Housing Plan (2010), promotion of a diverse mix of housing types, and support for private and volunteer programs that address the issue of housing affordability.
5. **Arts Facilities & Amenities.** Support continued development of Sisters Country's artisanal culture and economy, including facilities and working spaces that nurture arts, crafts, music and the performing arts, as well as arts-related amenities and services. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
6. **Walkable Downtown.** Continue to expand pedestrian-friendly amenities in Downtown Sisters, encouraging residents and visitors to get out of their cars and walk. Encourage and support evening pedestrian activity in Downtown Sisters.
7. **Bike-Sharing Program.** Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to develop and promote a community bike-sharing program in Sisters, making bicycles available for shared use by residents and visitors on a short-term basis for touring in the city and surrounding countryside.
8. **Integrated Transportation System.** Implement the updated Sisters Transportation System Plan addressing changes in local/regional growth and new State transportation policies. Determine a preferred alternative to address congestion on Highway 20 in Downtown, exploring alternate routes and roadway designs, traffic management strategies, bicycle and pedestrian options, signage, and centralize public parking. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
9. **Improved Regional Public Transit.** Working through Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), pursue improvement and expansion of regional public transit services serving Sisters Country, providing more frequent service between Sisters and key destinations in Redmond and Bend.
10. **Expanded Trail System.** Support Sisters Trails Alliance and the U.S Forest Service in expanding and integrating bicycle and hiking trails throughout Sisters Country and beyond, connecting unincorporated rural communities with Downtown, linking Sisters to Redmond and Bend, and facilitating appropriate access to recreational areas.
11. **Parks, Recreation & Greenspace.** Identify potential new parks, greenspaces and recreation sites and facilities in Sisters Country to meet the needs of a growing resident population and

create new public amenities and visitor attractions. Recognize and honor the City of Sisters' status as a Tree City.

- 12. Whychus Creek Corridor Restoration.** Continue implementation of the Whychus Creek Management Plan for restoration of the Whychus Creek corridor in Sisters Country, including improved water quality, riparian habitat, fish re-introduction, and recreational and public access.
- 13. View Corridors & Dark Skies.** Develop plans and policies to preserve signature view corridors throughout Sisters Country that are integral to the community's character, identity and tourism appeal. Evaluate and improve existing polices to minimize interference with the area's dark skies in urbanized parts of the region while addressing challenges to public safety.

RESILIENT SISTERS

- 1. Public Safety Planning & Coordination.** Improve and expand interagency planning and coordination among local, State and Federal agencies addressing public safety in Sisters Country, including the City, County, Parks, Fire District, Schools, Forest Services, County Sheriff, and others.
- 2. Service Providers Quality & Capacity.** Explore ways to maintain and improve the quality and capacity of public safety and social service agencies in Sisters Country as the region's population grows, including actions to offset the potential impacts of decreased State funding.
- 3. Sisters Country Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan.** Develop a Sisters Country Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan addendum to the Deschutes County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, providing place-specific information on mitigation issues and strategies for the Sisters Country region.
- 4. Fire/Drought Resistant Building & Development Codes.** Review and update City of Sisters and Deschutes County building and development codes to improve and enhance the fire and drought resistance of homes, communities and landscapes in Sisters Country. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
- 5. Communications Connectivity.** Improve communications connectivity in Sisters Country with special attention paid to underserved areas, including telecommunication, broadband, mobile and Internet services.
- 6. Disaster Preparedness & Response.** Continue to promote enhanced coordination of disaster preparedness and response efforts in Sisters Country with the statewide network. Improve and enhance free disaster preparedness and socioeconomic resilience training and education programs, working through key agencies including the City, Schools, Parks, Fire District, County Sheriff, ARC, Chamber of Commerce, and local/regional businesses. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)

- 7. Emergency Response Volunteer Programs.** Develop new approaches to expand, train and support the pool of local residents serving as active volunteers in support of public emergency response programs and services, including volunteer rural fire fighters in the region, general aviation pilots, Sisters-Camp Sherman fire corps, and others.
- 8. Pedestrian Safety for Residents, Visitors & Children.** Improve pedestrian safety for residents, visitors and children in Sisters, developing safer crosswalks at strategic locations, improving senior and ADA-compliant accessibility, and maintaining and improving safe routes to schools.
- 9. Access to Healthy Outdoor Activities.** Create year-round opportunities for exercise and healthy outdoor activities accessible to both residents of and visitors to Sisters Country, promoting greater community wellness and psychological wellbeing.
- 10. Enhanced After-School Programming.** Enhance after-school programming for Sisters School District students, developing shared use agreements to expand the range of organizations, facilities, and activities involved in promoting community resilience.
- 11. Age-Friendly Community.** Support the increased awareness of an "age-friendly" community in Sisters Country, coordinating key organizations in sharing resources, funding and advocacy including issues of relevance to all ages and abilities.
- 12. Urgent Care Facility.** Aggressively pursue establishment of a comprehensive facility in Sisters to provide walk-in urgent care and related ambulatory care and medical services for a rapidly growing population, as well as the increasing numbers of visitors and tourists.
- 13. Emergency and Homeless Housing.** Strengthen and enhance the response to needed emergency housing and cold weather shelters in Sisters Country, promoting greater cooperation between social service agencies, nonprofit groups, religious organizations and service clubs, and community volunteers. (★Top Pick, Forum Participants)
- 14. Low-Income Advocacy.** Develop a stronger voice for Sisters Country's lower income residents and their needs for housing, health care and other services, developing greater collaboration between the region's existing advocacy organizations such as FAN, Habitat for Humanity, and others.