

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 13, 2023



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BITTERROOT VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE: ONE YEAR LATER

It has been a year since the 2022 levy for the Bitterroot Valley Community College failed. Since that time, little if anything has been heard from or about BVCC; this silence has been intentional. The defeat of the levy demanded the Board of Trustees take a step back, to evaluate what happened and determine what next steps should be taken. The Bitterroot Valley community sent a strong message that required a strong response, and the Board of Trustees have committed this year to doing just that.

The many hours of hard and honest discussions and debates among the Trustees have resulted in an ambitious roadmap to moving the Bitterroot Valley Community College forward. “In 2020 our community voted for the establishment of this community college district by a 17% margin. As elected officials for Bitterroot Valley Community College, it is the charge of the Board of Trustees to advocate for and lead the effort to make BVCC a reality,” says Carrie Guarino, Chair of the Trustees. “It is now time for our community to tell us what they want and need.”

Beginning this summer and continuing through the fall, BVCC Board of Trustees is launching its “Ask and Listen” campaign, in an effort to re-connect and re-engage with the community. Trustees will be participating in a number of summer events and festivals, asking local residents questions and collecting their responses. The “Ask and Listen” campaign will continue in the fall involving conversations with local groups, businesses, and associations. “We need to ask the tough questions, the most important question being, ‘what did we do wrong?’” says Paul Ashcraft, Vice-Chair of the Trustees. “The answers to these questions will be critical in determining future programs, training, and coursework to meet the needs and interests of our community.”

Early feedback received last year from the Ravalli County community was clear – asking for financial support without a concrete start-up plan was highly unpopular. To address this concern, the Trustees participated in many strategic planning sessions throughout the year to define both the vision and mission of Bitterroot Valley Community College. These meetings resulted in the BVCC Business Plan, publicly released on the college website in January 2023 (bvcommunitycollege.org). The Business Plan provides detailed information about programming, including job training and general education courses transferable to a 4-year university and a variety of community education and enrichment options for all.

Bitterroot Valley Community College has been serving as host institution for the Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) Program in Hamilton this past year, offering classes for local veterans

with the intent to continue and expand programming as needed. The feasibility of offering not only VUB but also other courses and programs in Stevensville and other towns in the community college district is also being discussed.

The unspoken question on many minds is, “Are we ultimately choosing, then, between UM Bitterroot (formerly Bitterroot College UM) and Bitterroot Valley Community College?” As Jean Butler, Trustee and Chair of the Strategic Planning Special Committee explains, “This is not a competition. Bitterroot Valley Community College’s plan would take what UMB has begun and build upon it, making a local college that is permanent, sustainable, and responsive to our community’s needs. We would welcome collaboration with the University of Montana, creating a strong partnership that will greatly expand the educational opportunities available in our valley.”

When asked to describe what BVCC hopes to achieve, Butler replied, “Bitterroot Valley Community College will provide education locally for people who work, and for people who want to work.”

For more information on the BVCC Business Plan and the minutes of all BVCC Trustee meetings, visit the college website at bvcommunitycollege.org.

Bitterroot Valley Community College, public community college district in Ravalli County, Montana; bvcommunitycollege.org | PO Box 1946, Hamilton, Montana 59840
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Bitterroot Valley Community College Trustee Leadership: Chair Carrie Guarino, Vice Chair Paul Ashcraft, and Secretary Jean Butler (from left to right).