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## Thoughts and comments for Making Boulder's Future Bright

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To: "drew.dawson@gmail.com" <drew.dawson@gmail.com>

Hello Drew and other members of MBFB,

My name is Jodi Makela and I grew up in Boulder. I have past experience in photography, office management and internal event fundraising for Montana non-profits. I also worked for a short time with The Boulder Monitor and BACC. My husband, Dylan, worked for the past three years in the tourism industry as a researcher and writer for Hawaii's most successful guidebook. He gained valuable insight into all aspects of the tourism industry; reviewing tour companies, dining establishments, and hotels as well as investigating and mapping public features such as hiking trails. Prior to this Dylan worked as an archaeologist across Montana, having earned a Master's Degree from the University of Montana.

We are interested in relocating to Boulder. Our love of Montana and entrepreneurial ventures could bring us back to the area. We started following the coverage of Making Boulder's Future Bright in the summer of 2016 and are enthusiastic about the possibilities outlined in the Master Plan. The idea of making Boulder *the* destination between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks is a well conceived goal. We believe there is potential to not only capture the attention of regional visitors, but international visitors as well: specifically the growing number of tourists from Asia.

In 2015, there was a 10-year, reciprocal travel visa granted between the U.S. and China. The number of Chinese outbound travelers in 2015 topped 130 million with around 3 million coming to the United States. According to market research many of these visitors are looking for American-style shopping experiences. However, large numbers are coming to the western states to experience the natural wonder, fresh air and health benefits associated with the great outdoors. The brand recognition of Yellowstone National Park and its iconic imagery is a driving force behind the desire for these groups to visit the area. Though the Park Service doesn't keep track of visitors' origin, they do keep track of the number of buses that enter the park. In 2015 more than 10,500 buses were counted entering YNP, a 17% increase over the previous year (which had also seen a substantial increase of 21% over the previous year). The year 2016 also saw a record number of visitors for both Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. In an article from the Bozeman Daily Chronicle from September 6, 2015, the owner of Yellowstone Big Gun Fun, an indoor shooting range, says Chinese tourists make up 80% of the range's summer business. Shooting guns is something most Chinese never get to experience and the owner says they see 20-30 tour buses a day. According to Michael Zakkour, co-author of *China's Super Consumers: What 1 Billion Customers Want and How to Sell it to Them*, on average the Chinese visitor spends more than double the amount a North American traveler does (~\$7,500 compared to \$3,000) per capita, per trip.

The Boulder area brings an incredible and unique western experience. One of the initial draws

that can appeal to the international visitor is health tourism. Boulder Hot Springs and the health mines such as Free Enterprise offer not only a continuation of a Montana experience but the possibility of enhanced health as well. For those that must tolerate crowded and polluted conditions at home, this proposition could be a real draw. The Montana Quarterly published a story on the radon mines around Boulder in this past year, further increasing visibility statewide and beyond (both the author, Thomas Goltz, and owner/editor, Scott McMillian, are friends of ours). Cultural experiences can also be an opportunity. With the cooperation of local ranchers and their employees, visitors could see what a working, historic cattle ranch is like, whether through observation or participation. Allowing the local cowboys to hone their rodeo skills for small groups of tourists could be mutually beneficial, both financially and culturally. Tours of the many ghost towns and vestiges of our past makes for great photo opportunities, something all travelers can appreciate. Services such as these could exhibit Boulder's resources while at the same time preserving and strengthening them. We feel we can help facilitate and organize this endeavor via non-profit and for-profit organizations.

As stated in the Master Plan concerning the downtown Boulder business district, we have a chance to revitalize our downtown. While enhancing Boulder's image yet maintaining our sense of place, we have the chance to cater to an international audience. This can further help distinguish us from other Montana towns. Examples include: a quality, Asian restaurant could make Boulder a year round dining destination, higher-end Western boutique shopping, and boutique hotels/lodging in the upstairs of downtown buildings could reestablish Boulder as an overnight destination. Enriching what is available while keeping the needs of the current community at the forefront will be integral to the plan's success.

Getting the word out about Boulder to an international audience is more within the community's grasp than is readily apparent. We don't have to reinvent the wheel to bring these visitors to Boulder; they are already in Montana. By tapping into existing services and reaching out to those organizations providing sightseeing tours, we may bypass some of the initial challenges of funneling those visitors in. By also approaching the Master Plan goals from a cultural or artistic standpoint, more State and Federal grants could become available that enhance Boulder's visibility. Already across the state there are programs promoting cultural and arts exchanges between Asia and Montana, such as the Yellowstone Asia Initiative and the Greater Montana Foundation. There are many diverse people in the arts and government that can be resources as we develop Boulder's marketability. Dylan's godfather, the Livingston artist Parks Reece, has been traveling to China as a part of the art exchange over the past couple of years and in turn hosts Chinese artists visiting Montana. Dylan's brother has assisted as an interpreter and cultural guide with the art exchange as a fluent speaker Mandarin and Cantonese. He is a PhD candidate in cinematography at UT, studied at the University of Hong Kong, and has myriad connections across Southeast Asia. Perhaps even the now retired Max Baucus, who served as the U.S. Ambassador to China over the past 3 years, could be a potential ally in the promotion of Montana and the Boulder area to a Chinese audience.

We are very excited for the future of Boulder. Apologies for the 11<sup>th</sup> hour comments but we hope to have some positive input for the final comment process. We are available via email at [makelajodi82@gmail.com](mailto:makelajodi82@gmail.com) and [dhaymans@hotmail.com](mailto:dhaymans@hotmail.com). We hope to be in the Boulder area in the month of February and look forward to continued correspondence. Thank you for your time.