

Is the "Garden City" as Green as it Claims?

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Audience: Those who know but don't care

Major Revision

I came across a link on Facebook to an article the other day that claims that Missoula is in the top five of the healthiest and greenest cities in America, in which Missoula was ranked as number two. At first, I thought, "Awesome! Yes, Missoula totally deserves that ranking!" However, after I read this article and compared the other cities in this article to Missoula, I truly began to think about whether Missoula does live up to these claims. I can confirm that the statements mentioned in the article were true by having lived in Missoula for over 10 years. The city is definitely one of the healthiest cities in America and it does have green aspects. However, Missoula needs a lot of improvement when it comes to being a real "green" city.

Missoula has plenty of "health food stores," "an ever growing population of vegans and amenities to satisfy them," and "a solid population of permaculture proponents," as proposed by the article. Being green and healthy in a city expands so much farther than these few proponents. To call a place green, the city and its residents must put full effort into being environmentally-friendly and sustainable, and to call a place healthy, the city and its surrounding area must have full opportunity to have access to places to exercise and live a genuinely happy lifestyle. In this article, there was a correlation between a happy lifestyle and having access to the outdoors. While Missoula has amazing opportunities for healthy living through the outdoor experience, living in a truly sustainable city is something Missoula's residents have yet to fully experience. Missoulians do not regularly use public transportation, and there are few established bike-only lanes in Missoula. However, one of the largest aspects of being green is the ability to recycle.

I find a huge component to being green is the ability to recycle. Missoula does have a few recycling programs; however, the city does not have the abilities to recycle everything. According to Garden City Recycling's website, Missoula does not recycle all seven types of plastics nor does it routinely recycle glass (Garden City Recycling). This can be extremely inconvenient to a majority of the residents willing to recycle these items because they cannot simply put their recycled materials into their recycling bins at home and have them picked up. These two recyclables are huge components of every day trash. Anyone who wants to recycle glass must take extra effort to bring their recyclables to Target to a drop-off bin, which can be extremely out of the way for some residents. The University of Montana, however, is taking the steps to becoming the greenest place in Missoula, as the college does take all seven types of plastics. Compared to some other "top five" cities in this article, Missoula's recycling cannot compare.

According to Portland's government website, Portland, the number one city in this article, has a recycling policy implemented through the Portland City Code and Administrative Rules (The City of Portland). Their goal for 2015 is to raise the recycling rate to 75%. Salt Lake City has a recycling rate of 34% and a goal to raise it to 50% by 2015 (SLC Green). According to Missoula's official website in a 2011 legislative session, its recycling rate in 2008 was 19.6%, which is far below the national average (Recommendations). With that, according to a video on MakeItMissoula.com, Missoula also only recycles 16% to 18% solid waste while the United States has an average of 34% (Missoula Recycling Guide). The matter of the issue is how to exactly get Missoula residents to recycle at a higher rate.

It is no secret that Americans often take the easy road in life when possible, such as eating takeout instead of making dinner, buying brand new items when the old ones break instead of fixing them, and throwing absolutely everything out. As said on the video on MakeitMissoula.com, "it's a lot easier to throw something in the trash than take the extra five seconds to sort it in your bins" (Missoula Recycling Guide). It seems as if not many people in Missoula understand the benefits of recycling, whether it is environmentally and economically, and this is something that Missoula needs to be reminded of at a mass scale. It reduces wastes, prevents pollution, saves energy, conserves natural resources, and so much more. Montanans should especially care because sometimes it is our own timber resources that are turned into commodities that will never go back into the environment. However, many people claim they do not have time to recycle.

Everyone today lives fast paced lives, and when something does not fit into the fast-paced lifestyle (such as recycling), it often may not happen or get done. The cost of recycling may be driving others away too. However, as shown through the same video of on MakeitMissoula.com, with the rising prices for garbage, where in some places it is now based on quantity, taking the time out of one's day to cut down on the waste can be beneficial in many aspects (Missoula Recycling Guide). While all of this can be attributed to the fact that Missoula has a small population and is not near any large industries to use these recycled materials, Missoula cannot be boasted as green if recycling is at such a low rate and not a normal activity for Missoulians. All Missoulians need to be educated about recycling and its benefits, and there needs to be far more advocating towards it, such as large programs that could be held in Caras Park that

would be advertised widely throughout the city. Missoulians always flock to large festivals in Caras Park, and if Missoula held one focused on recycling and how Missoulians can recycle, I feel like many more Missoulians would sign up for recycling. I also believe children should be taught at a young age in schools not only what recycling is and why it is beneficial but to always recycle everything so that it becomes a habit. I feel as if the Missoulian people do care about the environment and understand why we should recycle, but Missoulians need to be motivated to do it. It could be as simple as through education or even through competition, such as a competition between neighborhoods or sections of Missoula in seeing who recycles the most in one month and could have bragging rights all throughout Missoula. As told through the 2011 legislation session, "it will take a concerted effort by the state and individuals to increase the recycling rate."

As I stated earlier, Missoula is definitely healthy in many ways, from our health food stores to our multitude of outdoor activities, and the city has some very green aspects about it as well. However, a city is only as green as its residents want to be, despite having programs available, and this is exactly why Missoula needs to work on getting the citizens excited and signed up for recycling.

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