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Friday, February 13, 2026

mtstandard.com

HOTEL DEER LODGE

RETURN FROM RACK AND RUIN?



MEGAN NIELSEN PHOTOS, MONTANA STANDARD

Hotel Deer Lodge in Deer Lodge on Feb. 10.

Brownfield's grant sought in renewed effort to restore 115-year-old, long-vacant landmark

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DEER LODGE — Plaster fragments crunch and crumble underfoot. Wood lath that once backed wall and ceiling plaster lingers like the skeletal ribs of a beached ship.

One staircase leans, the victim of water damage from a compromised roof. A steady breeze blows through a frame once occupied by a window. Pigeons perch like squatters.

The circa-1911 Hotel Deer Lodge has sat vacant and deteriorating since the late 1980s. The three-story, rectangular brick and stone building occupies a large footprint on both Main Street and Missouri Avenue and its looming presence has long stirred debate about its status and future.

Eyesore or landmark? Worthy of preservation or wrecking ball bound?

Previous efforts to save the building have yielded little.

A new entity has emerged, with apparent vigor, faith and commitment, and its ultimate goal is to position the building on a long road to recovery.

Last month, Rising Star Academy, a Deer Lodge-based nonprofit, acquired Hotel Deer Lodge from a previous nonprofit that had been intent on the building's preservation but had run out of steam. No money changed hands.

Deer Lodge native Kelly Cutler helped found the Rising Star Academy, whose mission includes providing theater camp opportunities for children.

The academy formed a Hotel Deer Lodge subcommittee, with Mitchell Gunter as chairman, to pursue the building's preservation. Cutler serves as an adviser.

Amanda Cooley, planning director for Powell County, said establishing a new nonprofit to shepherd the hotel project was necessary to move forward, especially for the quest of an EPA Brownfields cleanup grant of $4 million.

The grant application was filed late last month.

That money could seal the roof, address asbestos and lead in the building and set the restoration on a path toward possible fruition, Cooley said.

"It's a public safety risk right now and we very much want to address that," she said. "The first priority is the roof."

Cooley is a member of the hotel committee but emphasized her membership is independent of her role as planning director.

Cutler said Deer Lodge's central business district will be greatly diminished if the Hotel Deer Lodge is transformed into rubble and carted away.

"It seems like if this building isn't standing here, even if it's decaying and falling apart, that would leave a big hole in the community," he said.

According to a National Historic Register inventory of the Deer Lodge Central Business Historic District, Hotel Deer Lodge was designed by H. F. Beinke of St. Louis.

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Kelly Cutler, vice chair of the subcommittee for hotel restoration under Rising Star Academy, looks around a room in the Hotel Deer Lodge on Feb. 10.

DATA CENTER

6-month extension on land deal OK'd

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Terms of a potential land deal that would allow a company to build a massive data center in Butte have officially been extended for six months.

Sabey Data Corp. recently asked for a one-year extension on a Feb. 11 closing deadline for purchasing 606 acres in the Montana Connections Business Park just west of town. Among other things, the company says more time is needed to determine power issues.

Some citizens and commissioners wanted the land deal scrapped entirely, saying a new one can be negotiated after Sabey answers more questions and there is more certainty about power usage, jobs and other issues tied to the project.

But on a 9-3 vote last week, the council agreed to extend the closing date for six months instead of a year. Commissioners called it a compromise but it still needed Sabey's approval to take effect.

Karen Byrnes, Butte-Silver Bow's community development director, told The Montana Standard on Wednesday that Sabey had signed the new agreement and the closing deadline has been extended to Aug. 11.

The amended land deal also includes new assurances that no final land transfer takes place without approval from two-thirds of the county's 12 commissioners.

Mike Smith is a reporter at the Montana Standard with an emphasis on government and politics.

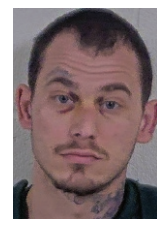
Man gets 10 years prison for stabbings

McCulley can't be paroled until he serves five years

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A judge sentenced a Butte man to 10 years in prison Wednesday for stabbing a man and woman multiple times in a Silver Bow Homes apartment before they managed to barricade themselves in a bathroom.

Prosecutor Ann Shea initially charged 32-year-old Shawn Kelly McCulley with two counts of attempted deliberate homicide after the rampage on Jan. 30, 2025. Each count was punishable by up to 100 years in prison.



McCulley

But at the request of the victims, Shea offered McCulley a plea agreement and he pleaded guilty to two counts of assault with a weapon, each with a maximum prison term of 20 years.

On Wednesday, District Judge Robert Whelan agreed to Shea's recommendations and for each count, sentenced McCulley to 20 years in the Montana State Prison with 10 of those years suspended.

The sentences run concurrently, meaning McCulley got a 10-year prison term and, at Shea's request, is not eligible for parole for the first five years.

According to charging documents, a woman said McCulley had been in her apartment the previous night and was not taking his medications. He was there the next morning when another man came over, and when McCulley saw a tattoo affiliated with a certain Native American tribe, an altercation broke out.

McCulley stabbed the man and woman multiple times in the head,

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