

The old Baker State Bank Building at 102 Main Street in Baker is the second oldest building in Baker, and the only remaining structure that still retains the characteristics that it had when it was built in 1910. This landmark brick building, at the intersection of two major highways in Baker, sat unused and had fallen into disrepair in recent years. SMART purchased the vacant building in 2020 with the goal of saving the last remaining monument to Baker's past after the historic Baker Hotel was demolished in 2006.

Since that purchase, SMART has been able to clear the building of asbestos and lead paint and what was a dilapidated relic of the past is now a thriving hub right in the heart of downtown Baker, housing three brand new, locally owned businesses, one selling regional, Montana products on consignment, as well as helping drive traffic to the entire downtown business district. Along with plans for a future visitor center in the connected addition to the building, SMART also intends to reimagine the second story of the building into affordable housing. Although those plans, and the very future of the building itself, would be in jeopardy without urgently needed renovations and repairs to the roof.

The funding provided by the Montana Historic Preservation Grant will not only allow us to save this historic gem in downtown Baker, but also ensure the long-term health of the property as well as giving us the opportunity to address the critical housing shortage in the community, a shining example of mixed-use property, by utilizing the second story in addition to the downtown commerce generated on the main level. Great swaths of Montana's history continue to be lost, especially in rural communities, every year, and we strongly encourage the Legislature to continue funding this important grant and to support projects like The Baker State Bank Building that are crucial, not only to our community in Baker, but to Montana.