July 21, 2026
Visit Big Sky Board Meeting

Attendees:
Emilie Wagner, Thad Beatty, Vanessa Tracey, Katie Alvin, Mike Bergin, Michael Jacquard, Terasina Bononini, David O'Connor

Board Meeting Minutes Approval

The board approved the minutes from June 30th with an edit to add Katie's association with Big Sky Arts Council and East Slope Outdoors. Meeting minutes were approved with a motion from Thad, second by Katie. Approved

June Financial Performance Review

Tammie presented the June financials, reporting total assets of $620,557, which was up from both the previous month and the same period last year. The organization has uncommitted funds for the state, resulting in $362,278 in restricted net assets for CVB. While total revenue exceeded budget by $75,000 due to additional payments received in June, program expenses were under budget by $37,000, leading to a net revenue of $124,000 compared to the budgeted $43,000. Brad mentioned that three new board members get more information at the board orientation within the next two weeks to understand the complex budget and funding structure. The board approved the June financials following a review during the executive committee meeting on Monday. Financials were approved with a motion from Thad and 2nd by David. Approved.

Community Coalition Strategic Infrastructure Update

Brad introduced Jackie Haynes from BSRAD, who provided an update on the Big Sky Community Coalition's strategic infrastructure initiative. The Coalition continues to focus on three community priorities: **water infrastructure, transportation, and wildfire preparedness**.

Jackie reviewed several projects under consideration, including improvements to the community water system, transportation infrastructure, and wildfire mitigation efforts. She highlighted innovative snowmaking systems being used in communities such as Red Lodge, Deer Valley, and Heavenly Valley to assist with wildfire suppression. Big Sky is exploring similar opportunities, including installing specialized hydrant fittings and expanding snowmaking infrastructure to improve emergency response capabilities.

The presentation also included an overview of the proposed **Targeted Economic Development District (TEDD)** and **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)** as potential funding mechanisms for critical infrastructure projects. Jackie explained that TIF districts capture future increases in property tax revenue to fund public infrastructure improvements without creating new taxes. TIF districts are established for a 15-year period, with the possibility of renewal if the tax base returns to its original frozen value, and require approval from the county commissioners rather than a public vote.

Discussion centered on the challenges of securing county commissioner approval. Jackie noted that misconceptions remain regarding how TIF districts function, with some believing they primarily benefit developers rather than supporting public infrastructure and workforce housing. While there is support from some commissioners, the overall outcome remains uncertain. Coalition partners are continuing educational efforts with commissioners and the public while addressing questions related to environmental impacts, staff capacity, and funding commitments.

Katie asked about the financial risks should taxable values decline rather than continue to grow. Jackie acknowledged there is some risk but explained that the 15-year funding horizon provides flexibility and that Big Sky's taxable value has increased approximately 22% over the past decade. Financial projections used in the proposal assume a conservative annual growth rate of approximately 2%.

The Coalition requested continued support from the Chamber Board and Visit Big Sky through staff participation, letters of support, and public testimony during upcoming county commission meetings. The current timeline anticipates presentations to the Gallatin and Madison County Commissions in September and October.

Coalition representatives emphasized that they are unaware of any alternative funding mechanism capable of delivering the same level of infrastructure investment. Should local approval not be obtained, they indicated they may pursue legislative solutions at the state level. Over the coming months, the Chamber will also assist with community outreach and public education efforts to build awareness and support for the initiative.

Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) Update

Brad provided an update on the ongoing efforts to establish a Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) in Big Sky. He outlined the challenges encountered with the traditional TBID model, primarily the inability to obtain the participation required under current Montana law. Several short-term rental property management companies have declined to share property information or sign petitions, making it difficult to reach the required 60% participation threshold needed to move the proposal forward.

While organizations such as Big Sky Resort and the Stay Montana have been supportive, other major vacation rental management companies have not participated, limiting the feasibility of the traditional TBID approach.

Brad presented two potential paths forward:

- **Traditional TBID Model:** Continues to require county commissioner approval, participation thresholds established by state law, and enforcement through property assessments.
- **Voluntary Tourism Partnership Model:** A “pay-to-play” approach in which lodging providers voluntarily participate through individual agreements, potentially collecting a modest nightly assessment to support destination marketing efforts.

The board discussed the advantages and challenges of each model. Members noted that the previous board had supported a comprehensive TBID that included both hotels and vacation rentals, while the current board has not yet established a consensus on the preferred direction.

Brad reported that approximately **$4,000** remains from the original **$50,000** TBID planning budget. Staff will continue researching enforcement mechanisms, evaluate the viability of a voluntary funding model, and gather additional feedback from lodging partners and property owners.

Staff will return to the board with recommendations and potential next steps after completing additional outreach and analysis.

Big Sky PR Coverage Success

Emele Hibdon presented significant PR wins for Big Sky, highlighting the major achievement of being featured on the cover of Conde Nast Traveler's America 250 issue, which included Lone Mountain Ranch and reached approximately 9.6 million readers across different markets.

She explained that the story took years to develop and required unique, high-quality photography including aerial footage, emphasizing the value of professional photography over stock images. The discussion included details about the financial value of the coverage, estimated at around $1 million, and the ongoing benefits of extending the story's shelf life through partner channels.

The group discussed a successful media coverage achievement, with Visit praising the team's PR efforts and highlighting Emily's excellent representation of their community. The main focus was on the organization's accounting firm transition, with Visit explaining they received three proposals after a formal RFP process and are reviewing them in a 1 o'clock meeting.

Accounting Firm Transition Discussion

Brad explained they received three proposals after a formal RFP process and are reviewing them in a 1 o'clock meeting. The three finalists are FNCH Financial, Rudd & Company, and HBK, with budget considerations ranging from $84,000 to $176,000 annually, and a decision expected by Friday with contracts to be signed next week. Brad also suggested organizing a half-day board retreat to educate new members on budget and funding regulations.

Project Updates and Strategic Planning

Liz presented updates on two main projects: updating signs in Town Center and Meadow Village with new logos, and introducing a new "boards in stores" program similar to ones in Massachusetts where artists paint skis, snowboards, or surfboards for display and auction, with 50% of proceeds going to artists and 50% to the chamber.

The board discussed logistics including potential locations, artist engagement, and timing for implementation before Christmas Stroll.

Brad reported on a successful Helms Briscoe corporate familiarization trip that cost $14,000 and included 20 travel agents, with positive feedback from participants. The conversation ended with a discussion about the need for strategic planning and potential changes to the executive report format.