Visit Big Sky Board Meeting Minutes

Date: April 28, 2026
Time: 9:01 a.m.–10:53 a.m.
Location: Hybrid / Zoom

Attendees:
Chris Dunkerson
Vanessa Tracey
Thad Beatty
Stacie Harris
Emilie Wagner
Michael Jacquard
David O'Connor

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m. A quorum was confirmed.

2. Public Comment

Jenny Pelej, Division Administrator for Destination MT at the Montana Department of Commerce, provided public comment regarding lodging tax distributions, financial reporting, and compliance processes.

Jenny clarified that Visit Big Sky's lower February payment was not due to delayed state funding, but rather because the prior year included a one-time settlement payment from a lodging facility delinquency. She also discussed Commerce's review of compliance procedures, the transition to third-party auditing, and ongoing efforts to provide clearer guidance, templates, and training for DMOs statewide.

Board members asked questions regarding prior Commerce guidance, past clean audits, current compliance expectations, and how Visit Big Sky should proceed moving forward.

3. Approval of March 2026 Minutes

Emilie Wagner made a motion to approve the March 2026 meeting minutes. Thad seconded the motion.
Motion passed unanimously.

4. Finance Report

Brad noted that Tammie was unavailable due to vacation and had prepared a video financial report. Due to technical issues, the report could not be played during the meeting. The board discussed sending the report out afterward and addressing approval at a follow-up meeting.

5. FY2024 Form 990 Review and Approval

Brad presented a summary of the FY2024 Form 990, covering the fiscal year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

Key points included:

- The return reflected a deficit of approximately $95,000, largely related to the Wayfinding project and use of carryover funds.
- Total revenue was approximately $1.8 million, down from approximately $2 million.
- Total expenses were approximately $1.9 million.
- Year-end assets were approximately $437,000, down from $520,000.
- Resort tax and Department of Commerce funding represented approximately 93% of revenue.
- Visitor guide advertising sales generated approximately $128,000.
- Brad noted the need to implement and circulate a conflict of interest policy for board members to sign.

Board members reviewed the return and had no major concerns.

David made a motion to approve the Form 990. Thad seconded.
Motion passed unanimously.

6. FY2027 Marketing Plan Review

Brad presented the draft FY2027 Marketing Plan required for submission to the Department of Commerce and review by the Tourism Advisory Council.

Key discussion items included:

- The plan format was designed to be more useful as both a state submission and internal planning document.
- Funding allocation remains 60% destination marketing, 20% destination management, and 20% destination stewardship.
- Research tools include Datafy, VisaVue, Destimetrics, and other local data sources.
- Emerging market opportunities include domestic airlift markets, international markets, and new summer visitation tied to Kircliff and scenic tram experiences.
- Earned media and public relations remain a major priority.
- Board members discussed the growing importance of AI search optimization and ensuring Visit Big Sky's website and earned media help shape accurate destination information.
- Stacie recommended better alignment between goals and objectives, with each goal having clear, actionable objectives and measurable outcomes.

- The board discussed how Visit Big Sky can differentiate Big Sky beyond skiing, luxury lodging, and Yellowstone access, including arts, culture, entertainment, culinary experiences, and group travel.
- The board requested more clarity around budget categories, including what expenses fall under education, outreach, earned media, tourism sales, and administration.
- Brad presented a conservative draft Commerce budget of approximately $850,000, reduced from the prior year's $944,000 planning figure.
- Brad noted approximately $60,000 in anticipated uncommitted funds that may carry forward.

The board agreed that additional edits were needed. A follow-up board meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, May 5 at 9:00 a.m. to revisit and approve the revised marketing plan and financial report.

7. Board Recruitment

Brad reviewed potential candidates for upcoming Visit Big Sky board vacancies, with the goal of adding two new board members at the June marketing luncheon and potentially additional members in the fall.

Names discussed included:

- Terasina with RMC
- Allison with Montage
- Katie Alvin Arts Council
- Cameron Laughlin Big Sky Vacation Rentals
- Adam from Gravity Haus
- Jason Klein from Big Sky Resort
- Mike Bergen from Big Sky Resort

The board discussed the need for tourism industry representation, Big Sky Resort representation, property management experience, marketing expertise, and active participation.

8. June Marketing Luncheon

Brad reviewed plans for the June 17 marketing luncheon at Big Sky Resort's Talus Room.

The draft agenda includes:

- Networking
- Big Sky Resort summer update
- State and local tourism data

- Presentation from DVA Advertising
- Bozeman Airport air service update
- Lunch and networking
- Optional gondola and tram experience
- Brief official board meeting to approve new board members and recognize outgoing board members

The board discussed the $45 registration fee and generally agreed it was appropriate.

9. Staff / Executive Updates

Brad and Liz provided several updates:

- Resident and visitor sentiment surveys closed, with approximately 757 visitor responses and 523 resident responses reported at the time of the meeting.
- Spring Bingo is launching again, with 28 participating restaurants and expanded prizes.
- Public safety work is underway, including crosswalk painting and signage needs before summer events.
- Brad shared an update on the MDT snowplow housing pilot project, which allowed a plow, driver, and maintenance truck to be based in Big Sky during the winter.
- Brad participated in a Yellowstone Country media event in Los Angeles focused on winter tourism.

10. Board Member Reports

Board members shared updates from their respective organizations.

Highlights included:

- Several lodging and hospitality partners reported a challenging but generally solid winter, with late booking patterns and weather-related impacts.
- Big Sky Resort reported a strong finish to the winter season, strong scenic visitation to Kircliff, and continued focus on non-ski experiences. Savor is on an indefinite pause.
- Lone Mountain Land Company shared updates on the Live Local affordability program and Cold Smoke housing project.
- Retail and hospitality partners reported strong winter sales and increasing organic awareness of Big Sky.
- Discussion included a possible frontline/concierge familiarization program to better educate local staff on community offerings.

11. Officer Vacancies

The board discussed the need to fill the Secretary/Treasurer position and begin planning for future board leadership, including chair and vice chair roles, with Chris stepping down in June.

12. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m.