

**BIG SKY RESORT AREA DISTRICT  
11 LONE PEAK DRIVE NO. 204  
BIG SKY, MONTANA**

**MINUTES OF THE APPLICATION REVIEW MEETING  
OCTOBER 21, 2025, 9:00 A.M.**

**MEMBERS:**

Sarah Blechta	Chair
John Zirkle	Vice Chair
Grace Young	Secretary and Treasurer
Michelle Kendziorski	Director
Kevin Germain	Director (via teleconference)

**STAFF:**

Daniel Bierschwale	Executive Director
Jackie Haines	Director of Economic and Strategic Development
Kristin Drain	Finance and Compliance Director
Tammy Estensen	Communications and Community Engagement Director
Jenny Christensen	Deputy Director
Kim Beatty	Legal Counsel

Minutes prepared by Bethany Young of Minutes Solutions Inc. from a recording

**1. ROLL CALL**

There being a quorum present, and adequate and proper notice of the meeting having been given, the meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

**Kevin Germain** expressed appreciation to the Big Sky Resort Area District (BSRAD) staff for the smoothest and best prepared Board packets in the last 10 allocation cycles and to the applicants for answering all the questions.

**3. NEW BUSINESS**

**3.1 Chair Welcome**

Sarah Blechta welcomed attendees to the nonprofit application review meeting. She emphasized that when the community connects with each other, collaborates with purpose, and creates with intention, Big Sky is the very best it can be.

Danny Bierschwale provided an overview of the grant process which has transitioned to the fall. The 2026 requests are for either 12 months or 16 months to cover the transition period. The order of projects within an impact area is determined by the project score.

**3.2 Arts and Culture Impact Area FY26 Application Review**

**3.2.1 Big Sky Community Language Learning Program: World Language Initiative**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to move the World Language Initiative to the education and childcare impact area. Motion carried.**

Sarah Blechta noted that organizations self-select their impact area for requests. Kevin Germain indicated that English and Spanish education belongs in the education impact area which is under allocated, while the arts and culture impact area is overallocated.

Declaring a conflict of interest, John Zirkle recused himself from all conversations and votes regarding the Big Sky Community Language Learning Program request.

### **3.2.2 Arts Council of Big Sky: Big Sky Center for the Arts Capital for a Building Transformation**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the Big Sky Center for the Arts capital for a building transformation 12-month request at \$1 million. Motion carried.**

### **3.2.3 Warren Miller Performing Arts Center: 2025/2026 Annual Cultural Programming**

**On a motion made by Grace Young, seconded by Kevin Germain, it was resolved to fully fund the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center 2025/2026 annual cultural programming 16-month request at \$290,000. Motion carried.**

Declaring a conflict of interest, John Zirkle recused himself from all conversations and votes regarding the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center request.

### **3.2.4 Arts Council of Big Sky: Music in the Mountains 2026**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the Music in the Mountains 2026 12-month request at \$250,000. Motion carried.**

## **3.3 Conservation Impact Area FY26 Application Review**

### **3.3.1 Gallatin River Task Force: Gallatin River Access Restoration**

**On a motion made by Grace Young, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the Gallatin River access restoration 12-month request \$210,064. Motion carried.**

### **3.3.2 Gallatin River Task Force: West Fork Restoration**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by John Zirkle, it was resolved to fully fund the West Fork restoration 12-month request at \$258,820. Motion carried.**

### **3.3.3 Grow Wild: Forest Stewardship**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved not to fund the forest stewardship request. Motion failed.**

**On a motion made by John Zirkle, it was resolved to fund the forest stewardship request for \$31,243 to cover administrative costs. Motion failed.**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fund the forest stewardship 12-month request for \$76,609 with the \$24,023 forestry portion contingent on Grow Wild obtaining \$50,000 in matching funds, and with the condition that Grow Wild attends a Q1 Board meeting in 2026 with a plan for a larger forestry partnership including the Big Sky Owners Association (BSOA), Forest Service, Gallatin County, Madison County, and the fire department. Motion carried.**

Jennifer Mohler, Grow Wild, explained the original request was reduced due to the loss of \$50,000 in funding from the Big Sky Fire Department due to Gallatin County funding changes. As a result, the \$24,023 requested to support a forester position that would not be filled was removed. The remaining request was for \$31,243 for administration costs and \$25,000 for Alpengardens.

The Board emphasized that the forester position is important to Big Sky to help landowners avoid insurance cancellations and to contribute to projects ultimately improving water quality.

#### **3.3.4 Gallatin River Task Force: Big Sky Water Conservation Program**

**On a motion made by John Zirkle, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the Big Sky water conservation program 16-month request at \$101,703. Motion carried.**

#### **3.3.5 Gallatin River Task Force: Water Monitoring**

**On a motion made by John Zirkle, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the water monitoring 16-month request at \$88,169. Motion carried.**

#### **3.3.6 Grow Wild: Land Stewardship**

**On a motion made by Grace Young, seconded by Kevin Germain, it was resolved to fully fund the land stewardship 12-month request at \$100,075. Motion carried.**

#### **3.3.7 Grow Wild: Wildlife Habitat Conservation**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the wildlife habitat conservation 12-month request at \$94,605. Motion carried.**

#### **3.3.8 Big Sky SNO: Climate Action Plan (CAP) Implementation**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by John Zirkle, it was resolved to fully fund the Climate Action Plan implementation 16-month request at \$300,000. Motion carried.**

The Board requested that Big Sky SNO attend a Q1 Board meeting in 2026 to present their metrics and updates.

#### **3.3.9 Gallatin River Task Force: Water Planning, Coordination, and Outreach**

**On a motion made by John Zirkle, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the water planning, coordination, and outreach 16-month request at \$134,988. Motion carried.**

The Board noted that water is one of the most important things to Big Sky, and there is a need to find ways to work together with the Gallatin County Commission, other than a Targeted

Economic Development District. This request will provide for education on the importance of supporting the Gallatin Canyon Water and Sewer project to reduce septic system pollution.

Kristin Gardner, Gallatin River Task Force, indicated that this is the time to bring all the stakeholders together and provide outreach of the most accurate and up-to-date information.

The meeting was adjourned for a break at 11:00 a.m.

### **3.4 Economic Development Impact Area FY26 Application Review**

The meeting was reconvened at 11:20 a.m.

#### **3.4.1 Visit Big Sky: Destination Research and Stewardship Plan**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the destination research and stewardship plan 16-month request at \$277,333. Motion carried.**

The Board asked if small business owners had been surveyed regarding increasing the shoulder season activities. Brad Niva responded that discussions are underway about a survey.

#### **3.4.2 Visit Big Sky (VBS): VBS Operations**

**On a motion made by Michelle Kendziorski, seconded by Kevin Germain, it was resolved to fully fund the Visit Big Sky operations 16-month request at \$300,000. Motion carried.**

Brad Niva responded to Board questions regarding visitor and spending data, the community calendar and the visitor and resident sentiment survey.

#### **3.4.3 Big Sky Chamber of Commerce: Chamber Operations Programming**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the Chamber operations programming 16-month request at \$206,667. Motion carried.**

Board discussion took place around membership and revenue growth and short-term rental memberships.

#### **3.4.4 Big Sky Chamber of Commerce: Development of Business Skills Programming**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the development of business skills programming 16-month request at \$116,000. Motion carried.**

The Board expressed concern for the application's low score and asked how more people could participate in the program.

Brad Niva explained the staffing needs, challenges of the program, and the type of programming offered.

Megan Proter, Vice President of the Chamber, reported that the business skills program continues to grow and that many graduates currently serve in leadership positions on Boards in the community.

The Board discussed the impact that a TBID would have on providing matching funds for future requests. Brad Niva indicated that if a TBID is created, the amount of support is dependent on the fee chosen by the industry.

### **3.5 Public Comment on Arts and Culture, Conservation, and Economic Development Projects**

Two emails expressing support for the Arts Council of Big Sky requests, and three emails expressing support for the Grow Wild requests were received and included in the meeting packet.

**Tim Drain**, Board Chair of the Big Sky Chamber of Commerce and regional manager of business development for Natural Retreats, shared support for the economic development requests under review.

**Buff Burrows**, a local musician and producer of the Lone Peak Film Festival, expressed his support for the arts funding and the Big Sky Center for the Arts request.

**Thad Beaty** of the Lone Mountain Land Company expressed support for the Arts Council requests.

**Steve Karl**, a Big Sky resident, shared support for the forest stewardship request.

**Lizzie Peyton**, Director of Big Sky SNO, expressed support for the forest stewardship request.

**Tallie Lancey**, supporter of the Arts Council, expressed support for the Center for the Arts.

**Deb Lewis**, a local musician, expressed support for the Arts Council's capital request for the building transformation.

**Sarah Gaither**, Programs Manager of the Big Sky Community Food Bank, supported the request for the Arts Council building.

The meeting was adjourned for lunch at 12:30 p.m.

### **3.6 Education and Childcare FY26 Application Review**

The meeting reconvened at 1:30 p.m.

#### **3.6.1 Big Sky Discovery Academy: Early Childhood Student Tuition Assistance**

**On a motion made by Michelle Kendziorski, seconded by Kevin Germain, it was resolved to fully fund the Big Sky Discovery Academy's early childhood student tuition assistance 12-month request at \$200,000. Motion carried.**

The Board shared data from the community survey tied to the costs of childcare in Big Sky. They also discussed the need to have a standardized unit or method to compare childcare providers and their public funding requests.

**Beth Marlinton**, Head of School at the Big Sky Discovery Academy, explained that the \$5 million request anticipated in FY28 is the estimated cost to purchase the building, and they do not plan to request the total amount from BSRAD.

#### **3.6.2 Friends of the Big Sky Community Library: Big Sky Community Library**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the Big Sky Community Library 12-month request at \$106,108. Motion carried.**

### **3.6.3 Morningstar Learning Center: Early Childhood Education and Tuition Assistance**

**On a motion made by John Zirkle, seconded by Kevin Germain, it was resolved to fully fund the Morningstar Learning Center early childhood education and tuition assistance 16-month request at \$900,000. Motion failed.**

**On a motion made by Grace Young, seconded by John Zirkle, it was resolved to fund the Morningstar Learning Center early childhood education and tuition assistance 16-month request at \$850,000. Motion carried.**

The Board expressed concern for declining enrollment and asked if there were potential cost savings if the trend continued.

**Mariei Butan**, Executive Director of Morningstar Learning Center, indicated that family populations are declining in the community and that Morningstar is investigating modeling tools for future budgeting. She explained the cost of care, the cost of tuition, and the associated deficit, and the school needs to maintain financial responsibility.

The Board further discussed a standardization of childcare support. They were concerned that resort tax dollars are subsidizing every child, regardless of financial need, and would like to see full tuition charged to those who can afford it.

**Mariei Butan** explained the relationship of labor costs, tuition fees, and families' tuition assistance needs.

The Board raised difficult questions on childcare funding in anticipation of philanthropy dollars decreasing in response to increasing property taxes. The final \$850,000 funding granted was determined by multiplying the average enrollment of the previous three years (50) by \$57 a day by the 298 days in the 16-month request.

### **3.6.4 Big Sky Community Language Learning Program: World Language Initiative**

**On a motion made by Michelle Kendziorski, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the World Language Initiative 12-month request at \$60,000. Motion carried.**

Declaring a conflict of interest, John Zirkle recused himself from all votes regarding the Big Sky Community Language Learning Program request.

The Board encouraged increased collaboration with the school district.

## **3.7 Health and Safety Impact Area FY26 Application Review**

### **3.7.1 Big Sky Community Food Bank: Big Sky Workforce and Community Food Security**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the Big Sky workforce and community food security 16-month request at \$100,000. Motion carried.**

### **3.7.2 Riley's Urgent Fund for Friends: Big Sky Animal Shelter**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by John Zirkle, it was resolved to fund the Big Sky animal shelter 12-month request at \$105,757. Motion carried.**

The original request was for \$150,000. The grant amount was limited by the balance available in the health and safety impact area.

### **3.7.3 Wellness in Action: Affordable Counseling Program for Improved Mental Health**

**On a motion made by John Zirkle, seconded by Kevin Germain, it was resolved to fully fund the affordable counseling program for improved mental health 12-month request for \$115,000. Motion carried.**

Declaring a conflict of interest, Michelle Kendziorski recused herself from all conversations and votes regarding the Wellness in Action request.

The Board indicated that if a wellness district is created in Big Sky, this type of application could be funded by them, reducing the burden on BSRAD funding.

### **3.8 Housing Impact Area FY26 Application Review**

#### **3.8.1 Big Sky Community Housing Trust (BSCHT): BSCHT Operations and Administration**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Grace Young, it was resolved to fully fund the Big Sky Community Housing Trust operations and administration 16-month request at \$475,000. Motion carried.**

The Board discussed the low score resulting from the matching funds and partnerships component of the scoring matrices, which needs to be taken into consideration for housing.

**David O'Connor**, Executive Director of the Big Sky Community Housing Trust, indicated that future projects and properties would provide additional income that would decrease what appears to be a reliance on BSRAD funding.

### **3.9 Recreation Impact Area FY26 Application Review**

#### **3.9.1 Southwest Montana Mountain Bike Association (SWMMBA): Elkhorn Downhill Trail**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by John Zirkle, it was resolved to fully fund the Elkhorn downhill trail 12-month request at \$50,000. Motion carried.**

The Board mentioned that they would like to see more recreation applications involving trails go to the Big Sky Trails, Recreation and Parks District (BSTRP). They were impressed by the number of SWMMBA volunteer hours and asked how the trail would be annually maintained.

**Wes Hoecker**, Vice President of Trail Dogs, the Big Sky Chapter of SWMMBA, provided more details on the Elk Horn Trail.

The Board planned to have the Community Investments Subcommittee communicate with BSTRP to determine what projects may be appropriate for them to collaborate on.

#### **3.9.2 Gallatin Valley Snowmobile Association: Buck Ridge Snowmobile Trail Additional Grooming**

**On a motion made by Kevin Germain, seconded by Michelle Kendziorski, it was resolved to fully fund the Buck Ridge snowmobile trail additional grooming 12-month request at a cost of \$30,000. Motion carried.**

**Kristina Welfl**, Gallatin Valley Snowmobile Association, further explained the sled tax in response to board questions.

### **3.9.3 Beehive Basin Access Alliance: Securing Public Access to Beehive Basin Road and Beehive Basin Trailhead**

The Board removed the Beehive Basin Access Alliance request after determining it could not be funded in its current state. The Board will review a microgrant application from the organization in November 2025.

### **3.10 Public Comment on Education and Childcare, Health and Safety, Housing, and Recreation Projects**

Eight emails in support of the Morningstar Learning Center grant request were received and included in the meeting packet.

**Daylyne Gardner**, employee of the Wilson Hotel, shared a comment in support of Morningstar Learning Center's request.

**Buff Burrows** supported all education funding requests that provide invaluable services to the town, particularly the library.

**Stephanie Kissel** supported fully funding the Morningstar request.

**Mariel Butan**, Education and Child Care Sector representative of the Coordinating Council of Big Sky, thanked the Board for their ongoing support of education and expressed support for the World Language Initiatives request.

**Wes Hoecker**, Vice President of the Morningstar Board of Directors, supported the full funding of Morningstar.

**David O'Connor** hoped that the Board would consider the similar challenges with housing and childcare funding as they work through the best way to address the community's childcare needs with costs that are difficult to accept

**Anna Johnson**, Director of Community Engagement at Lone Mountain Land Company, expressed support for the funding requests of Morningstar and Discovery Academy.

**Liz McFadden**, Vice President of Visit Big Sky, expressed support for Big Sky Discovery Academy's request.

**Kiernan McCarthy**, Director of Programs at Wellness in Action, thanked the Board for their support of the housing trust request from a mental health perspective.

### **3.11 Remaining Business**

There was no additional business.

## **4. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

**Danny Bierschwale** thanked Jenny Christensen, Kristin Drain, Jackie Haines, and Tammy Estensen for their tireless work to support the community of Big Sky.

5. **NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next Board of Directors meeting is October 23, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

6. **ADJOURNMENT**

**On a motion duly made and carried, it was agreed that there was no further business to transact; the meeting closed at 3:15 p.m.**

**DISCLAIMER**

The above minutes should be used as a summary of the motions passed and issues discussed at the meeting. This document shall not be considered a verbatim copy of every word spoken at the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Grace D. Young

Grace D. Young (Dec 18, 2025 08:05:10 MST)

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Grace Young, Secretary and Treasurer







# 2025.10.21 Minutes

Final Audit Report

2025-12-18

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