

MADISON and GALLATIN COUNTIES JOINT COMMISSION MEETING

DATE: April 29, 2021

LOCATION: Ballroom at the Wilson Hotel in Big Sky Town Center
145 Town Center Avenue, Big Sky, Montana

EGGS & ISSUES at 8:30 a.m. - Sponsored by the Big Sky Chamber of Commerce

TIGER Grant: A Case Study in How Our Growth is Being Managed: Discussion and updates focused on the TIGER Grant Project with a goal of helping the public understand what this construction will look like and the benefits of investing in Infrastructure. Since it is no secret that the Big Sky community is growing in many ways, one of the questions frequently paired with this observation is how Big Sky's growth is being managed. The Big Sky Chamber assembled a panel of experts to talk about one of the largest infrastructure developments coming to the Big Sky community, the TIGER Grant Construction project. This project serves as a case study on how infrastructure investments are identified, addressed and why they are important to overall pedestrian and traffic safety while keeping in mind thoughtful growth in Big Sky.

- **How Did We Get Here?:** David Kack, Executive Director of Western Transportation Institute
- **TIGER Grant Updates:** Danielle Scharf, Principal Bozeman Region Manager of Sanderson Stewart
- **TIGER Grant Project Q & A**

Investing in Affordable Housing Infrastructure: Laura Seyfang, Executive Director of Big Sky Community Housing Trust

Important Upcoming Vote on Big Sky Transportation District: David Kack, Executive Director of Western Transportation Institute

JOINT COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING at 10:00 a.m. with Big Sky Resort Tax

Welcome & Introductions: Commissioner MacFarlane called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone, and the Commissioners from both counties introduced themselves: Gallatin County Commissioners Joe Skinner, Scott MacFarlane, and Zach Brown; and Madison County Commissioners Ron Nye, and Jim Hart (Commissioner Dan Allhands was absent for personal reasons).

Consolidation of Emergency Management Program in Big Sky: Patrick Lonergan, Gallatin County Emergency Management Chief, discussed the challenges of consolidating emergency management services in Big Sky with the community split in half by jurisdictional lines. He proposed formalizing these efforts by making long range plans and building a coordinated program that would be similar to law enforcement and search & rescue operations. A key part of the plan, he suggested, would be developing a new position dedicated to Big Sky preparedness plans and wildfire mitigation, and he invited Commissioner input and audience questions. Discussion included his estimated cost of \$85,000 for the new position, funding options including grants and assistance from both Counties, operational costs and logistics such as support staff and office space, job description, vital coordination with fire departments, Big Sky's sizeable infrastructure at risk, updating fire management and emergency services plans, taxable valuations, fuel mitigation, and mutual aid provided by County, State and Federal agencies. The Commissioners encouraged additional public comments and discussed having a joint meeting to further discuss coordination efforts, developing and funding a position, and next steps.

Jack Creek Road Update – Emergency Access: Commissioner Jim Hart, Madison County, gave an update on the Jack Creek Road improvement project. He recently met with Great West Engineering, the firm in charge of the project, and reported that the design has been completed with the three-mile stretch divided into several working sections. He said there are no plans for any blasting at this point, they intend to stay within the 60-foot easements, and were advised not to get much into the hillsides due to the abundance of springs in the area. Public meetings are planned and Jim is confident that people will be pleased with the plan to move the road away from the creek as much as possible, given public concerns about the effect of construction on the creek and water quality concerns expressed by entities such as DEQ. Advertising for construction bids will occur this spring, hopefully by the end of May, and he anticipates improved emergency egress to be in place as early as this fall. He noted that they will coordinate road closures with construction plans on Highway 64 to make sure the two roads are not closed simultaneously, and the current strategy for Jack Creek is that closures/wait times will occur within a specified time frame rather than closing the road completely. The cost is estimated at \$1 million and prices are rising so it will be interesting to see how the bids come in. Questions were asked about road closures occurring during fire season, and about the condition of the privately-owned section of Jack Creek Road. Jim said he has spoken with the Big Sky Fire Department's Deputy Chief about maintaining cooperation on the project. Overall the road project will make the three-mile stretch safer, and the private section is already pretty safe. Kevin Germain, Lone Mountain Land, stated that the two main goals of the road project are emergency egress and improving the Jack Creek water quality. He said Moonlight Basin has made it clear the gates on their privately-owned section of the road will be opened to the public in any emergency, reinforced that their section of the road is safe and up to County road standards of 24-foot widths with only one area that exceeds the grade, and expressed optimism about Jack Creek's water quality improving along the lower stretch as a result of Great West's design. He estimated that this project will bring about 80% of the County's three-mile stretch to the 24-foot width standard, leaving 20% that will not be done during this phase due to the expense. Jim discussed two bridges that need improvement, one of which is scheduled to be done in 2023 under the Treasure State Endowment Program, and requests to the legislature will continue for the other bridge. There was further discussion about fire escape options and safety zones, posting escape route information for visitors, and emergency signage such as reader boards with customizable messages.

Big Sky Resort Area District (BSRAD): Kevin Germain and Danny Bierschwale, BSRAD, discussed the following topics.

- **Big Sky Relief Update:** Kevin and Danny expressed appreciation to both Counties for their Public Health Departments' assistance and cross-county cooperation during the pandemic. Danny reviewed the accomplishments of the relief efforts to date:
 - recovery and resilience plans made possible by key partnerships including the health departments, employers, and the Chamber of Commerce;
 - a subcommittee formed just prior to Montana's first COVID case with funding from BSRAD focused on community safety and keeping Big Sky's critical economy open;
 - Big Sky Relief operating partners and funding partners met often to identify community needs and report back to BSRAD, and informed and interacted with the community through local media and launching a new website – bigskyrelief.org;
 - additional funding from Yellowstone Club, Spanish Peaks and Moonlight Community Foundations, grants, and CARES Act helped to support nonprofit organizations, businesses, individuals, and families to supplement resources lost due to the pandemic;
 - business closures were prompted by Madison County Health Department's lodging restrictions and State shelter-in-place orders;
 - masks and testing were identified as core areas for health and safety, 150,000 free masks were provided and used heavily by the community, and to date over 55,000 tests have been processed in Big Sky, identifying over 1,100 asymptomatic cases for quarantine;
 - schools returned to 100% in-person learning in the spring;
 - Big Sky Medical Center started receiving COVID vaccines in late December and vaccinations have been going very well with assistance from Bozeman Health and Madison Valley Medical Center;
 - grant funding provided additional hospital rooms at Big Sky Medical Center, 5 ventilators, additional PPE supplies, help to individuals and families, \$330,000 to local non-profits and \$450,000 to local businesses, and over 70 hours of no-cost behavioral health counseling.

Danny pointed out the enormous amount of energy and collaboration that has gone into local relief efforts by both health departments and many other local partners, as well as active participation by the local community. Discussing the importance of cross-county collaboration, he noted the financial significance to the tax district and pointed out how collaboration between Counties will be necessary for long term planning and will benefit not just the Big Sky community at large but each County as well.

- **Jointly Funded Efforts:** Kevin discussed find more efficient ways to collaborate on the efforts that are jointly funded by the Resort Area District and both Counties. The areas on the following list reflect critical needs for the community, but the only one with a multi-year agreement in place is the Sheriff's Department. He suggested forming a sub-committee made up of one Commissioner from each County and a representative from the Resort Area District that would meet quarterly to discuss these and any other jointly-funded efforts and make a funding recommendation to the governing bodies, which would move the process forward in a more efficient way. The idea was received positively and briefly discussed, noting the subcommittee could pre-negotiate request details and determine proportionate shares of the overall funding in an advisory report, which would help everyone see where the other entities stand and help the Commissioners see the whole picture as they make budgeting decisions. David Kack commented that the Big Sky Transportation District works with various sources of funding that have differing budget cycles and timing, and having the subcommittee in place would help them with planning, bring more certainty about local funding from year to year, and increase the possibility of developing a multi-year agreement. It was pointed out that an additional benefit of the subcommittee's input is the ability for budget managers to conceptually understand and forecast requests from a cash flow perspective, and to anticipate the need for related capital projects.
 - **Transportation**
 - **Sheriff**
 - **Search and Rescue**
 - **911 System**
 - **Noxious Weeds**
 - **Other opportunities**
- **ARPA Project Support:** Kevin stated that Sewer and Water is one of Big Sky's biggest critical needs. Equally important are how to safely and environmentally build out the community with respect to its watersheds, and making sure Big Sky can provide housing for its workers and those in need. The following topic includes an overview of four projects identified by Sewer and Water as critical for the community. Funding for these projects is being sought under the Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) working through the Montana Legislature, and the Commissioners were asked for letters of support for the projects.
 - **Big Sky Sewer and Water Projects:** Ron Edwards, Manager of Big Sky's Water and Sewer District, presented an overview of its wastewater projects. He noted that for the past few years they have been working on a water treatment plant project which recently went out to bid, the contract was awarded, and the work is anticipated to start in May. He presented an overview of Water and Sewer's four primary projects and noted that partnering with the Resort Tax District has helped with funding but without seeking additional funding through the ARPA program these projects would not be affordable. The Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) Phase 1 expansion will effectively double the plant size and resulting water quality will be significantly improved. It will be a 30-month build, and the estimated cost is \$51 million. WRRF Phase 2 expands on the plan adding acreage and addressing Big Sky's rapid growth. Water quality will be improved in the Gallatin Canyon watershed, effluent re-use opportunities will be increased, and improvements made to wastewater infrastructure for existing and new development, positively impacting tourism/visitation and workforce housing. Ron pointed out that the Gallatin Canyon Water and Sewer District was formed in late 2020 to service the development corridor along Highway 191 adjacent to the Gallatin River new Big Sky, an area primarily served by septic systems and private wells, and he reviewed some of their concerns and priorities such as nitrogen loading to groundwater connected to the river, human health risks from nutrient impacts, and a lack of centralized sewer collection and treatment. A sewer feasibility study was conducted by the Gallatin River Task Force in early 2020 to explore options for expanding wastewater infrastructure in the canyon, and he and Kevin discussed ARPA timelines and qualifications for applying for funding. He said costs are unprecedented and briefly discussed alternate funding sources such as DNRC and the State Revolving Fund. He also talked about drain fields that

serve the system, quarries and gravel pits in the Gallatin Canyon that might provide disposal areas, and ongoing efforts to return treated water to the aquifer.

- **BSCO's grant application to the Gallatin County Open Lands Program:** Whitney Montgomery, Big Sky Community Organization (BSCO), gave a brief overview of BSCO's application for funding from Gallatin County's open lands program. Kevin noted that large contributions have been made over the years to the open space fund through Big Sky's tax base, and he expressed support on behalf of the Resort Area District for BSCO's funding application. Whitney said the purpose of their application is to have a facility close to the community park to store equipment used for parks and trail maintenance, and Commissioner MacFarlane briefly reviewed the portion of open lands program funding that has been designated this year for smaller, public-access related projects to compete against one another, as opposed to competing with funds requested for large conservation issues.

Big Sky Chamber of Commerce: Anna Johnson, Big Sky Chamber of Commerce, reviewed the following topics.

- **Small Business COVID Response:** Anna reviewed accomplishments achieved through joint efforts with the State, Resort Tax Board, Visit Big Sky, and other entities and small businesses to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by educating visitors and making everybody aware of local safety initiatives. The response included:
 - Participation in the Montana Aware Campaign
 - \$192,500 in micro-grants of \$2,500 and \$5,000 to 57 small businesses
 - 250,000 masks and other PPE supplied free of charge, and signage to help businesses stay open
 - Big Sky Relief free community-wide surveillance testing programThese efforts boosted workforce confidence and helped business owners have a successful winter season, and she expressed pride in the community's resilience and mutual support.
- **Celebrating Small Business with Business Awards:** Anna announced the upcoming Black Diamond Business Awards dinner at the Big Sky Resort on June 22, 2021, recognizing outstanding work by small businesses in the community and said nominations can be submitted for awards in five categories.
- **Leadership Big Sky Update:** Anna reviewed Leadership Big Sky, a cohort of 18 next-generation business leaders who have, despite COVID precautions, nearly completed a successful year of getting an exclusive and in-depth look at Big Sky's business community and how it runs. She described the value of the program in terms of strong leadership, creativity, and investment in Big Sky's future. Participants developed their leadership skills and gained insight into the ins and outs of working in a community that straddles two counties through behind-the-scenes tours of development programs, emergency services, infrastructure organizations, and other community functions that enable Big Sky to operate. Applications for the 2021-2022 cohort will open on September 1, 2021.

Visit Big Sky: Caitlin Quisenberry, on behalf of Visit Big Sky, discussed the following topic.

- **New Marketing Efforts and Expectations for the Summer Season:** Visit Big Sky has partnered with Karsh Hagan, a branding and marketing agency, to help with marketing initiatives including a new website to help welcome the travel and tourism industry to Big Sky. They have been partnering with the State on the Montana Aware Campaign to increase awareness on COVID safety, masking and distancing, since research has shown that travelers want to go places that are taking these precautions. Marketing efforts and expectations for the summer season will be showcased at a free virtual event on May 20, 2021.

Public Comment: A board member of the Big Sky Trails and Park District, which involves both Counties, noted that the District works under the terms of an interlocal agreement that will expire in February of 2022. He said their board is working to update the agreement and to keep the district operating in the future. Cindy Purdue-Dolan, with Senator Daines' office, commented that Senator Daines is on the forefront of forest management and expressed support for wildlife mitigation and grants. With light at the end of the COVID tunnel, she expressed appreciation for the mobile lab that was a huge help to efforts in Big Sky, Gallatin County, and Madison County. Regarding Federal Transportation, she noted that their office will be watching closely.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Jane Bacon, Madison County Commissioner's Clerk