

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT OF MISSOULA

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 19, 2026 | 3:00–5:00 PM | In Person

All Present: Charlie Beaton, Ellen Buchanan, Scott Stearns, Chris McClead, Luke Jackson, Michael Albritton, Karen Sippy

Staff: Linda McCarthy, Jake Treece, Jack Hall, Carrie Harper

Guests: Christine Littig & Grant Kier from MEP; Geoff Badenoch & Greg Timmons from MCAC; Jason Crouch from ORI.

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 p.m.

INVITATION TO THE MONTANA MUSEUM OF ART & CULTURE

Geoff Badenoch and Greg Timmons of the Montana Museum of Art & Culture invited BID Board members to attend a special museum reception on June 23 from 5:00–7:00 p.m. Board members will have the opportunity to view current exhibits, enjoy refreshments, and learn more about the museum's collections and historical significance.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT – MISSOULA ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (MEP)

Christine Littig and Grant Kier presented MEP's annual report and overview of business development services provided during FY2025–2026.

Key Highlights:

- Conducted 49 business retention and expansion visits.
- Provided referrals, follow-up support, and coordination related to Downtown SAM, workforce housing, and infrastructure projects.
- Continued enhanced reporting and communication under the BID-MEP contract.

Business Challenges:

- Workforce shortages remain a significant concern.
- Housing and rental costs continue to impact employers and employees.
- Rising operating costs, property taxes, insurance rates, and rents are straining businesses.
- Business owner fatigue and burnout remain common concerns.

Downtown Business Trends:

- Significant business closures and ownership transitions have occurred, including Pangea, Stave & Hoop, The Depot, Plonk, James Bar, and Al & Vic's.
- Many long-established businesses struggle to adapt to changing technology, marketing tools, and social media platforms.
- Younger business owners generally report fewer challenges with technology adoption.

Workforce & Housing:

- Housing availability remains one of Missoula's largest barriers to business growth and workforce recruitment.
- MEP continues to promote workforce housing initiatives and support employers seeking recruitment solutions.

Downtown Engagement & Education:

- MEP has supported Downtown SAM communications and development of the Downtown Support Guide.
- Downtown Dialogues events continue to provide opportunities for business engagement and discussion.
- Educational webinars have been offered on commercial property ownership and business growth strategies.

Board members discussed long-term downtown sustainability, future business growth opportunities, and MEP's ongoing role in supporting the downtown business community. MEP requested feedback regarding the effectiveness and value of its services.

CHALLENGES FACING ORI & CLEAN TEAM

Jason Crouch of Opportunity Resources Inc. (ORI) provided an update on the BID Clean Team program and the challenges it may face in the future. He explained that the Clean Team has operated in Downtown Missoula for 20 years and continues to provide valuable services to downtown businesses while creating meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

However, changes in federal and state workforce policies increasingly emphasize competitive integrated employment, making it more difficult to utilize traditional vocational rehabilitation pathways to staff programs such as the Clean Team. As a result, ORI may need to explore new models for maintaining the program and its relationship with the Downtown Missoula Partnership in the future.

Crouch emphasized that the Clean Team remains fully operational, continues to provide important services, and is not expected to experience significant changes in the next year. However, the clients are aging. Two of them have been on the team for nearly the entire 20 years. He noted that ORI is committed to finding creative solutions to sustain and grow the program despite funding and regulatory challenges.

Board members discussed the importance of the Clean Team to downtown operations and opportunities for advocacy and community support. A celebration recognizing the Clean Team is planned for July, and ORI is currently conducting interviews for a new supervisor, as Bryce Miller has been promoted to another position.

REVIEW & APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Sippy motioned to approve April meeting minutes, Buchannan seconded, and the minutes were approved.

REVIEW & APPROVAL OF DDPO CONTRACT WITH MISSOULA POLICE DEPARTMENT

McCarthy presented the FY2027 Downtown Dedicated Police Officer (DDPO) agreement. Officer Rico Suazo has been assigned as the DDPO, and the BID and City will continue to share funding responsibilities. The City will cover all officer benefits, and a patrol zone map will be incorporated into the agreement. Mountain Line and the Parking Commission will remain funding partners. Due to current staffing limitations, weekend patrol coverage will not be available under the proposed schedule.

McClelland moved to approve the agreement. Jackson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

REQUEST FOR FUNDING – DOWNTOWN BUSINESS SUPPORT & RESILIENCY GRANT PROGRAM

The Missoula Downtown Foundation is fundraising for the new Downtown Business Support & Resiliency Grant Program and is seeking financial support from the BID for \$37,500. This funding request will be made for the next two years at \$18,250 per year in FY2027 and FY2028. Staff noted the RAISE Grant does not include funding for direct business support, and DMP is serving as a lead organization to help businesses prepare for and respond to construction-related disruptions.

The proposed grant program is intended to strengthen business resiliency, support customer traffic and vibrancy, and help sustain downtown tenants during construction impacts. The program would include two grant categories: Activation & Visibility and Access Adaptation. Grants are anticipated to range from \$1,500 to \$4,000, with a total fundraising goal of \$300,000 over two years. Staff hopes to complete fundraising in August and begin awarding grants in January. Eligible businesses would be located within construction-impacted areas, have fewer than 50 employees, and apply through an online application process. Grant funds would not be eligible for mortgage payments, taxes, or insurance expenses.

McClelland moved to approve the funding request. Jackson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

REVIEW & APPROVAL OF FY2027 BUDGET

Few changes were made to the proposed budget that was initially reviewed in April. The updated allocations and funding approved in this meeting were added including the policing contract, garbage and recycling, as well as the Downtown Business Support Fund contribution. Overall, the budget is tight but remains solid.

Albritton motioned to approve the FY2027 budget, Buchanan seconded, and all approved.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Total assets are \$131,000, down from the prior year. Net income shows a deficit of \$126,000. The city's garbage & recycling payment \$6,943 has been recorded. There is no snow removal revenue this year. On the expense side, the final payment for DMP quarterly salaries has been paid, and administrative costs are below expected levels. All other expenses remain standard.

Additional expenditures include ratepayer communications, the Clean Team contract, garbage removal, and black banding purchased for banner brackets. The Caras Canopy project has been completed with \$25,000 spent.

Current net income is \$102,808, reflecting a deficit for the year, though this is not unexpected given upcoming ratepayer payments. There is expected to be a delay in June assessments, likely received in August or September. Reporting from the city is still delayed.

DOWNTOWN BID ANNUAL MEETING: THURSDAY, MAY 28 AT THE RESIDENCE INN BY MARRIOTT

The meeting will be a breakfast format with food service at 8am and programming beginning at 8:30am. Conor McMahon from Sterling CRE, Grant Kier from MEP, and Megan McMeekin from the City of Missoula will be presenting. Approximately 50 are expected to attend.

PARTNER UPDATES FOR MDA & MDF

McCarthy shared event posters and handbills for MDA's upcoming events. She also noted the street skating features for the Beartracks Underbridge Playground will be installed in early June.

The canopy replacement project is nearly complete, with a celebration planned for June 24 at Out to Lunch. Out to Lunch and Downtown ToNight events are also upcoming.

With no new business or announcements, Beaton adjourned the meeting at 4:56 pm.