

State Tribal Economic Development Commission

Billings Hotel and Convention Center

1223 Mallowney Lane

Billings, MT 59101

9:03 a.m. - 2:41 p.m.

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024

The official meeting minutes may be accessed on the recording. There are issues within the recording due to periodic loss of internet connection.

Commissioners Present: Gerald Gray (Chair), Jennifer Finley (Vice-Chair), Shawn Backbone, Melissa Lonebear, Richard Sangrey, Delina Cuts The Rope and Misty Kuhl

Commissioners Present Virtually: Mark Blasdel and Paul Green — Connectivity issues at the beginning of the meeting prevented them from joining initially.

Montana Department of Commerce Staff Present: Mackenzie Espeland (in-person and virtual), Rachelle Brown, Marilyn Willson and T.J. Altekruise

Guests Present:

- Heather Latray of the Native American Development Corporation Paul Reichert of Prospera
- Tash Wisemiller, Kathleen Williams and Daniel Layton of USDA Rural Development
- BJ Johnson
- Anna Richmond-Miller of the National Center of Appropriate Technology
- Michael Veselik of Montana State University

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- Larry FallsDown of Diamond Hanging 7 Guest Ranch
- Paddy Fleming of the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

Call Meeting to Order

00:26 Chair Gray called the meeting to order.

01:10 Ms. Willson called the roll for Commission members.

Opening Prayer

01:56 Commissioner Backbone

Welcome

02:30 Chair Gray welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

02:39 Chair Gray requested public comment on non-agenda items. There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

02:54 Presenter: Chair Gray

Motion to approve: Commissioner Sangrey

Second: Commissioner Backbone

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

Commissioner Round Robin Discussion

- 03:46 Commissioner Kuhl explained she had missed the last STEDC meeting due to her attendance at a Headwaters Tech Hub retreat. She reported that she is on the steering committee, which is on track to obtain approximately \$700 million. She emphasized her role to ensure some of those funds will be used for workforce and economic development opportunities in Indian Country.
- 05:39 Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated that Fort Belknap Indian Community has been applying for grants. She had previously suggested to Commissioner Kuhl to advocate for tribes when she attends events. Commissioner Cuts The Rope affirmed Commissioner Kuhl is doing this. Commissioner Cuts The Rope also explained the tribe had some issues with Triangle applying for a Federal Communications Commission grant over top of them. Applying for competitive grants doesn't require tribal consultation or pre-approval from the tribe.
- 07:58 Chair Gray asked Commissioner Kuhl if she knew anything about the State Small Business Credit Initiative money. Commissioner Kuhl stated she did not. Mackenzie Espeland, Business MT division administrator, stated she would investigate and provide the Commission with further information.
- 09:07 Commissioner Backbone shared that the Crow Tribe recently had an election, and all four existing officials were re-elected. Commissioner Backbone requested a letter of support from the STEDC to the Billings Chamber of Commerce for the All-American Indian Shootout held in Billings at Metro Park from Dec. 5-7, 2024. The shootout was for all Indian schools and aimed to empower student athletes.

17:18 Commissioner Kuhl moved to have the STEDC write a letter of support to the Billings Chamber of Commerce for the All-American Indian Shoutout.

Second: Commissioner Cuts The Rope

22:11 Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

18:39 Vice Chair Finley shared that she is the Vice President of the Rocky Mountain Region for the National Congress of American Indians. They are doing an environmental study and would like input from all tribes about the barriers they face, along with solutions and innovations. Vice Chair Finley stated she would provide the flyer. She also shared that the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are looking into composting.

22:31 Commissioner Lonebear gave an update on the Northern Cheyenne Tribe's new leadership. The President is now Gene Small and the Vice President is Ernest Littlemouth Sr. She shared that she has two more years in her position.

24:01 Commissioner Sangrey stated that the Chippewa Cree Tribe has new council members.

25:00 Chair Gray stated that the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe held elections on Saturday. All positions were voted back in.

STEDC Topics for 2025

25:32 Ms. Willson asked the STEDC about the types of topics they would like to see on the 2025 STEDC meeting agendas, along with their opinions on the Indian Equity Fund recipients' awardees. The commissioners agreed they would like those to continue. Chair Gray expressed he would also like to see the round robin

discussion. Commissioner Kuhl stated she would like to know how many jobs were brought into Indian Country from the Indian Equity Fund Grants. She would also like Commerce to measure the economic impact of what these grants have done for people. Commissioner Kuhl asked TJ Altekruise, the Office of Indian Country Economic Development program manager, if he could provide this information.

Chair Gray and Commissioner Sangrey would like the Federal Reserve to present at an upcoming STEDC meeting regarding the survey of Native Nations.

31:11 Commissioner Kuhl discussed a project worked on this summer, collecting a snapshot of each tribe's economic development readiness. Tom Stergios and his consulting group, The Whole Group, worked on this project. He and a few interns helped put together tribal data. This data includes, but is not limited to, broadband capability, the average square foot price of retail space, household income and other different metrics. Commissioner Kuhl suggested this project be presented at a 2025 STEDC meeting.

Commissioner Sangrey asked if the STEDC should have the legislature as a topic, since it will be in session. Ms. Espeland stated she has been tracking bill drafts, and at this time there are no proposed bills regarding Indian Country economic development.

Commissioner Kuhl suggested that the first STEDC meeting in 2025 be held in Helena. Commissioner Kuhl stated she could possibly arrange for the governor to host a reception for the STEDC and for him to meet with the Indian Caucus.

35:50 Commissioner Backbone moved to have the first STEDC meeting of 2025 held in Helena.

Second: Vice Chair Finley.

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

Set 2025 STEDC Meeting Dates and Locations

36:15 Chairman Gray stated that the first meeting location would be held in Helena.

The commissioners set the meeting for Feb. 11, 2025. The commissioners set the rest of the 2025 meeting dates and locations as follows: May 8, 2025, in Great Falls; Aug. 8, 2025, in Billings; Nov. 14, 2025, on the Flathead Reservation.

STED Commission Members Roles and Responsibilities

45:10 Ms. Willson provided the commissioners with a copy of the “STED Commission Members Roles and Responsibilities” document with the new Commerce branding. The document will replace the old branding and can be found on Commerce’s website. Chairman Gray requested this document be provided to new commissioners.

46:31 Commissioner Sangrey asked if the commissioners needed permission to testify at the legislature. Ms. Willson stated she believed they would need to obtain permission if they were to speak on behalf of the Commission or Commerce. Ms. Espeland also stated they would need permission. However, they are free to speak on behalf of their tribe, community, themselves or anything else they’d like to promote separately. Ms. Espeland stated she would provide guidelines that Ms. Willson could send to the commissioners.

Tribal Tourism

49:04 Rachele Brown presented information and updates on Tribal Tourism. The Tribal Tourism Program's goals are to elevate the brand, expand opportunities and inspire visitation to Tribal Nations. Ms. Brown informed the Commission that the Made in Montana Trade Show will be held in Helena in March 2025. Ms. Brown asked anyone who knows someone interested in becoming a Native American Made in Montana member, or who is already a member but hasn't been featured in the trade show and can handle wholesale orders, to contact her. Ms. Brown will assist them in getting signed up for the program.

Ms. Brown discussed the Production Assistance Program. There have been 24 graduates. Due to some difficulties, the program is currently on hold, but Ms. Brown hopes to relaunch it before the next STEDC meeting.

Ms. Brown reminded the Commission that the Governor's Conference on Tourism will be held in Helena at the end of April 2025.

Ms. Brown discussed the International Indigenous Tourism Conference being held in Montreal, Canada in February 2025. The Commission had voted in the August 2024 STEDC meeting to approve STEDC members or their delegates for attendance at the conference using the funds from the half-percent bed tax collection. Ms. Brown requested that the STED commissioners notify her as soon as possible if they or someone from their tribe will be attending.

Ms. Brown reminded the commissioners of potential grants they or their tribe may be interested in applying for. These grants included the Pilot Community Grant, the Tribal Tourism Grant and the Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant.

Ms. Brown explained that there will be an \$8,000 sponsorship agreement going out to all the Montana Tribal Nations. These sponsorships are intended to support the Tribal Community Tourism events happening in 2025.

Ms. Brown discussed the Tribal Tourism Working Group and the timeline for new videos and photography content to be completed in the summer of 2025. Ms. Brown plans to present to tribal councils for consultation in November 2024. The Tribe will select two to four tribal tourism working group members. These groups will meet three times with Ms. Brown remotely, for approximately two hours per meeting, between December 2024 and January 2025.

Workforce Study with Montana Photonics/Quantum Alliance and Prospera

1:37:00 Paul Reichert, executive director of Prospera, and Michael Veselik, director of economic development for the Office of Research and Development at Montana State University, provided information regarding the quantum industry. It aims to serve the national priority around quantum computing. Prospera is working with MSU and company leaders in the photonics and quantum industry. Mr. Reichert explained that, while Montana probably won't be building quantum computers, we will likely be in the supply chain for the industry, which he stated includes many different aspects. He discussed with the Commission the best way to include tribal communities and tribal colleges in this industry.

Rural Energy for America Program

02:00:03 Kathleen Williams, the state director for the USDA Rural Development, introduced herself to the Commission. Ms. Williams discussed the USDA and rural development in general. Daniel Layton discussed the Rural Energy for

America Program, which provides grants and guaranteed loan funding for renewable energy system installations and energy efficiency improvements for agricultural producers and rural small businesses. Mr. Layton also discussed the USDA RD REAP Technical Assistance Grant. This provides free grant writing and application assistance for REAP applicants living on Native American Reservations in Montana. Anna Adair, also known as Anna Richmond-Mueller, from the National Center for Appropriate Technology, a non-profit located out of Butte, stated that the center provides technical assistance. It partners with Native American Development Corporation, Native American Community Development Corporation and Montana Renewable Energy Association. Ms. Adair discussed what it provides, including eligible projects, eligible project costs and use of funds.

Mr. Layton discussed further the requirements and information regarding the REAP program.

FY 2021 Indian Equity Fund Recipient

2:46:39 Larry Falls Down, from the Diamond Hanging 7 Guest Ranch, presented on the Fiscal Year 2021 Indian Equity Fund Grant he received and shared how the grant helped his business. The Diamond Hanging 7 Guest Ranch hosts European children on a short-term basis to enjoy its outdoor experience. It also hosts different cultural events, weddings, etc. The ranch has horses, saddle sheds, cabins, a cook shack, a dance floor and other amenities. The Indian Equity Grant assisted them in obtaining new roofs for buildings.

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

3:05:01 Paddy Fleming, from the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, provided information on the MMEC. The MMEC is partially funded by the National Institute of Standards and Technology – Manufacturing Extension Partnership. The funding is based on the number of manufacturers in each state. The center also receives federal funding, state funding and a third of its budget is funded by customer fees. The MMEC is part of the MSU College of Engineering and was established in 1996. It is tasked with growth, innovation and sustainability. The center has an advisory board consisting of 12 Montana manufacturing company representatives. Mr. Fleming discussed the MMEC’s newest initiatives.

Mr. Fleming discussed manufacturing and its importance. He stated that every manufacturing job in Montana creates 2.63 additional jobs in the economy.

Mr. Fleming stated they have worked on 161 projects with 67 different clients on Montana Indian Reservations.

Mr. Fleming discussed photonics and quantum opportunities. Things that are needed include printed circuit boards, wiring harnesses and machined parts. There was further discussion.

HB 19

3:32:17 TJ Altekruze discussed updates on House Bill 19. Mr. Altekruze discussed the 2024 progress, including reviewing the mock dashboard, emphasizing it as just an example. In 2025, an implementation plan is being organized that will include receiving feedback from tribal nations as to what data points need to be captured and how they should be displayed, securing an economic quantitative analyst,

conducting tribal consultation, establishing data sharing agreements with tribes, identifying additional funding sources, and conducting a more robust build-out of the dashboard with internal and external tribal data for providing ongoing updates. There was further discussion on HB 19.

OICED Program Update

3:59:19 TJ Altekruze provided the OICED program update. Bryan Singer has accepted the entrepreneur development specialist position and will be starting the first week after Thanksgiving. OICED program provided a \$7,500 sponsorship to the 2024 EconoQuest. Mr. Altekruze reminded the STEDC that the Fiscal Year 2025 Tribal Business Development Business Grant application deadline is Dec. 20, 2024.

IEF and NABA Programs

4:01:23 TJ Altekruze stated the Indian Equity Fund application deadline was Sept. 30, 2024. There are 122 IEF applications. The Native American Business Advisors will perform the initial review, and the top five applications will be forwarded to Commerce to be reviewed by an internal team.

Mr. Altekruze stated they will be resuming monthly calls with the NABAs beginning Dec. 3, 2024.

Other Business

4:04:27 Jennifer Owen introduced herself as the director of the State Workforce Innovation Board, an advisory board to the governor. She stated that it's attached to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. Ms. Owen explained that the

board brings together state agencies, university systems, private sectors and community-based workforce development park partners to help the state workforce system. It helps coordinate the delivery of career services, education, training services, support services and other services that help people get to work. There was further discussion regarding the State Workforce Innovation Board.

4:09:14 Presenter: Chair Gray

Motion: Commissioner Backbone

Second: Commissioner Kuhl

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:41 p.m.