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One Big Sky District Strategy Partners Prepare for Next Steps

One Big Sky District Strategy Partners (Big Sky Economic Development, Billings Chamber of Commerce, Visit Billings, Downtown Billings Alliance and the City of Billings) will continue the work of creating legislation for a statewide economic development tool designed to attract private developers/investors to Montana.

Earlier this month on February 11th, Billings City Council approved the One Big Sky District Development Plan. Our community took a giant step forward and knew that the next step would be working with the state legislature to craft a statewide economic development tool, designed to incentivize private developers to lead in projects with private amenities and public infrastructure. After passing the development plan, council was asked to consider a contract amendment for the continued strategy partners work, statewide legislative efforts, and continued due diligence on OBSD. The city was not asked for additional funds, but to increase the amount of reimbursement in the event Landmark didn’t develop any of the catalyst projects. Council requested that the amendment’s language be tightened, dates be confirmed, and that legal counsel be given a final review. In tandem with the city, including input from council members, Big Sky Economic Development, legal teams from both parties, and the strategy partners, a final contract amendment was presented. After city staff recommendation and presentation, the council landed in a 5/5 tied vote, with the result of the amended contract not being approved.

We believed the amendment was fair and protected the city by requiring reimbursement only if the catalyst projects outlined in the development plan came to fruition without Landmark’s involvement. We as a community must now make some strategic decisions about moving forward with the approved development plan and the statewide legislative efforts. The City Council’s vote last night does not change the opportunity to create an innovative economic development tool for our state.

Today we shift our time and resources to securing the statewide legislation that would support our approved development efforts. It is important to note that Senator Webb’s legislation is the only proposal in Helena that looks to drive the Montana economy forward without a tax increase. Montana needs creative solutions to our constant challenge to fund community and infrastructure development. The team will be participating a conference call with the Helena team for a work session this Thursday to do a section by section review with Senator Webb regarding the legislation.
The strategy partner team would like to thank Landmark for their work to get our community a completed and approved development plan that lays a framework for our city’s future. Landmark’s professionalism and expertise has been invaluable through the many evolutions of this process, including last nights vote not to continue their contract. Bob Dunn, President of Landmark, in his communication with partners today, again praised our community and encouraged everyone to keep moving forward.

The strategy partners, business community and citizens of Billings are united and committed to a statewide economic strategy that brings us into alignment with our state's needs as well as follows what most other states in our region have already done. We don't have the luxury of waiting any longer to try and catch up to what they have been doing now for years.

We are going to double down on our efforts to craft legislation that accelerates economic development in a way that doesn’t place additional burden on citizens and communities. Our commitment to new, statewide economic development tools remains strong and will move forward.

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