

ONE BIG SKY DISTRICT/406 IMPACT DISTRICTS STRATEGY

Background

In the summer of 2018, the Billings Strategy Partners which includes Big Sky Economic Development, the Billings Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Billings Partnership, and Visit Billings came together with Landmark Development to create a master plan document for the heart of our downtown. This plan was adopted by City Council in February of 2019 and now serves as a roadmap for how the community moves forward on developing catalyst projects that will help drive greater investment in our community.

One of the needs identified in this plan is a mechanism that can help the private sector close the gap that exists between what it costs to complete new construction and the rent that is market rate in the downtown today. This mechanism came in the form of state legislation that was named Statewide Economic Impact Districts or 406 Impact Districts for marketing purposes. The legislation was not successful in the 2019 session.

Following the close of the legislative session through the summer of 2019, the Strategy Partners have been working on receiving community input on the planning and legislative process and researching best practices/emerging opportunities.

For this effort, Big Sky Economic Development (BSED) brought in Lisa Clark from Rochester, MN whose organization has successfully used a tool similar to the 406 Impact Districts. Additionally, BSED invited Kenan Fikri, an Opportunity Zone Expert with Economic Innovation Group to educate on this tool which can be deployed in the effort to move the One Big Sky District Master Plan forward. Following this learning and due diligence, the Strategy Partners have developed work areas and next steps to continue momentum.

Next Steps

Based on community and business leader input, insights from experts in the fields, and strategies identified in the One Big Sky District Plan, the following work areas and next steps have been identified. These committees will each meet to further refine their strategy moving forward.

Committee: Public Engagement/ Education

Goal Statement: To convene the community to explore challenges and opportunities, discuss the role a strong downtown has in securing a brighter future for the businesses and citizens of Billings and listen and implement recommendations from the community.

Chairs: Kelly McCandless, Billings Chamber, Melanie Schwarz, Big Sky Economic Development

Initiatives:

- Provide education on best practices from other communities
- Develop Outreach & Education Plan to ensure inclusive, effective engagement using all mediums
- Review existing branding and messaging for One Big Sky District
 - o Define simple messaging points for both brands and separating the two efforts to make each digestible
 - o Develop branding and positioning strategy along with brand and language standards and needed messaging materials such as website updates & collateral
- Maintain Data/Trends that relate to the “Why” for strategic community investment

406 Impact Districts/ Next Generation Economic Development Tools

Goal Statement: To refine the draft legislation based on state-wide input and strategize for a 2021 legislative effort.

Chairs: Steve Arveschoug, Big Sky Economic Development, Dan Brooks, Billings Chamber of Commerce, Kevin Iffland, City of Billings

Initiatives:

- Participate in the Montana Economic Developers working group on Economic Development Tools (Montana Economic Developers Association driven)
- Receive and compile input from the lobbying team to understand best route forward from their perspective
- Develop State-Wide working group on legislative tool
- Meet with regional legislators for feedback and to discuss next 18 months

One Big Sky District Plan Implementation

Goal Statement: To facilitate discussions and provide resources on tools/funding available to gain traction on catalyst projects identified in the planning document.

Chairs: Katy Easton, Downtown Billings Alliance, Allison Corbyn, Big Sky Economic Development, Andy Zoeller, City Finance Director

Initiatives:

- Opportunity Zones
 - o Research other community's approach to attracting funds (prospectus, online mapping, etc.)
 - o Collaborate with State and other communities to elevate Montana as a place to invest.
- Identifying first Catalyst Project

- TIF Capacity
- Elected Official/Community Support
- Dialogue with Local/Regional Developers
- Aligning Funding

Team Communication & Resources

Project Manager: Allison Corbyn, Big Sky Economic Development

- Hold regular Strategy partner meeting to maintain communication and alignment
- Following the development of workplan for each work area, develop budget and understand what resources are being contributed by each Strategy Partner along with partner contributors
- Consider a "Community/Leadership roundtable" to sustain community engagement