

Bonner Milltown Community Council

Meeting Minutes

April 13, 2026 | 7:00 PM | Bonner School Cafeteria & Via Zoom (Hybrid)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chair Rick Hall.

Roll Call

Council Members Present:

- Rick Hall, Chair
- Jane Kipp, Vice Chair
- Kaaren James, Treasurer
- Emily Herndon, Secretary
- John Wilke, Member
- Jessica Glebke, Alternate Member

The meeting was held in hybrid format with members of the public attending in person and online via Zoom.

Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda as presented by J. Wilke; seconded by J. Kipp. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – March 9, 2026

Motion to approve the March 9, 2026 minutes as written by J. Kipp; seconded by J. Wilke. Motion carried unanimously.

Bonner History Tidbit

The monthly history segment reflected on the theme that "nothing stays the same — no man ever steps in the same river twice" (Heraclitus, c. 535–475 BC), surveying three points in Bonner's recent past:

- **1976** — Following the sale of the Bonner Mill to Champion International, the mill employed over 1,000 workers with a payroll exceeding \$1.2M. The close-knit company-town culture of the Anaconda era began to erode as supervisors were no longer required to live in Bonner. Teacher Jas Peterson led a grassroots community history project, and Superintendent Jack Demons began archiving what would become ~1,500 historic photographs.

- **2016** — After the 2008 mill closure, the site was reinventing itself as a hub for roughly 10 new businesses (~250 jobs), including Kettle House Brewing, Hellgate Forge, and Montana Grove. Final PCB contamination was removed, the KettleHouse Amphitheater broke ground (opening 2017), and Milltown State Park opened in phases beginning in 2015.
- **2025** — UFP Edge announced closure of its Bonner facility, eliminating ~100 jobs. The proposed Blackfoot Crossing development emerged as a plan to convert ~107 acres of under-used industrial land along the Blackfoot River into a mixed-use area of housing, commercial space, light industry, and preservation.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

The following legislative candidates introduced themselves and offered to speak with attendees after the meeting:

- Nick Kava – candidate for House District 93 (Piltzville, Turah, Clinton area).
- Monica Tranel – candidate for House District 92 (includes Bonner-area carve-outs).
- Reggie Spaulding – candidate for House District 92 (Bonner East, Brazilian [sp.], Rattlesnake, Potomac).

An attendee noted he is locally screen-printing Montana 200 t-shirts at \$25 each and invited interested members to connect after the meeting.

Chair Hall reminded attendees that BMCC hosts a candidate forum during election cycles.

Announcements

Chair Hall noted there are currently 2–3 open seats on the Council and encouraged interested community members to apply (see Communications below).

Speakers

Immunization Clinic – Maggie Apuzzo, Missoula Public Health

Ms. Apuzzo, Immunization Clinic Coordinator for Missoula Public Health, announced an upcoming clinic:

- **When/Where** — Thursday, May 7, 2026, 3:00–5:00 PM, Bonner School.
- **Focus** — Primarily pediatric routine/recommended vaccines (MMR, rabies, polio, HPV, meningitis, etc.) ahead of the next school year.
- **Cost** — Insurance billed where applicable; a sliding fee scale is offered to uninsured/underinsured patients (maximum out-of-pocket \$21.32).
- **Also** — Missoula Public Health operates an International Travel Clinic by appointment for travelers needing vaccines (e.g., typhoid, yellow fever) not routinely available. Adult-focused clinics (RSV, shingles, pneumonia) can be arranged upon request.

Bonner Mill AI Data Center – Special Exception Permit Process

Presenting: Karen Hughes (Director, Missoula County Planning, Development & Sustainability); Jenny Dixon (Case Planner); and (Climate Action Program Manager). Chair Rick Hall recused himself as Chair of the Missoula County Consolidated Land Use Board (MCCLUB), which will decide the matter.

Process Overview:

- Data centers are permitted in heavy industrial zones, but because the proposed site is within 500 feet of residential zoning, it must go through a Special Exception review before the Missoula County Consolidated Land Use Board
- The public hearing is currently scheduled for Wednesday, June 3, 2026 at 6:00 PM (subject to change).
- The Special Exception review is narrow and focuses on impacts to adjacent residential uses: access, parking, traffic, lighting, noise/vibration, screening, and landscaping. A project page is posted on missoulacountyvoice.com.
- Four standards apply to data centers specifically: (1) pass the Special Exception impact review; (2) be zoned industrially (already met); (3) contract with a Montana state-licensed e-waste recycler; (4) provide new renewable energy for the entire operation (verified at zoning compliance).

Key Discussion Points:

- **Noise & Vibration** — Under Missoula County's 2022 regulations, noise from fixed sources (not cars/mowers) is limited by decibel AND frequency thresholds. The applicant indicates operations will not exceed 55 dB. The prior HyperBlock/Project Spokane/Tyke Block crypto operation's noise issue was frequency-driven and was addressed via fan replacements funded by Bonner Properties after a sound-engineering study.
- **Water** — Water quality falls under the Missoula Valley Water Quality District / Missoula Public Health; water quantity is regulated via water rights through DNRC. Missoula County planning does not have regulatory authority over industrial water use. The applicant describes a proprietary closed-loop cooling system. Mike (licensed water operator for the Bonner Mill site for ~10 years) shared context from his nightly per-building water logs: mill-site workers use ~7 gallons/day each; a representative building on site uses ~800 gallons/day (~200,000 gallons/year). Proposed data-center use (~500 gallons per megawatt) is, in his professional view, comparable in scale to existing site use.
- **Energy** — Infrastructure is built for up to 29 MW (legacy from HyperBlock). Applicant initially plans 5 MW. The "new renewable energy" requirement applies to the full operation; any expansion requires a new zoning compliance permit.
- **Heat Islands** — Citizen cited research cited a potential 2–16°F local increase in land-surface temperature and impacts perceptible up to six miles away. Planning is researching mitigation (tree plantings along the east property boundary are proposed).
- **Notice & Public Comment** — Property owners within 500 feet of the property line will receive mailed notice (being sent in the next ~3 weeks); a legal ad will run, and posters will be placed on the property. Preferred comment channel is the project page on missoulacountyvoice.com. Anonymous aliases and direct emails to the case planner are accepted. The school will also be notified; school board meeting is the following evening (April 14) at 6:00 PM.

- **Decision-Making** — Application review is narrow in scope — staff make recommendations; MCCLUB makes the final, quasi-judicial decision at public hearing. A positive finding is required on every criterion. Public opinion is not itself a review criterion, but comments are summarized and forwarded to the Board.
- **Other Avenues** — The Public Service Commission has a pending large-load tariff filing by NorthWestern Energy (>50 MW) that is open for public intervention and may significantly shape how data centers and large loads are regulated across the state.

Action/Follow-up:

- BMCC will invite representatives from Missoula Public Health, the Water Quality District, DNRC, DEQ, NorthWestern Energy/PSC, and the applicant (Crambo / Bonner Properties) to the next meeting for a broader Q&A.
- Chair reiterated that next meeting's Q&A will likely be limited to one question per person, with timed public comment, to accommodate the expected turnout.

Blackfoot Crossing – Andrew Hagemeyer, Missoula County Community & Economic Development

Director Hagemeyer provided an update on the Blackfoot Crossing development following the County Commissioners' recent decision:

- Commissioners approved the rezoning and subdivision as a resolution of intent; the property remains zoned heavy/light industrial pending adoption. A legal ad will run May 9 and May 16 advertising a 60-day comment period. Final action by Commissioners is scheduled for a July 9, 2026 hearing.
- Commissioners modified ~20 acres in line with community input rather than the developer's original proposal. As a result, Town Pump / Travel Plaza has withdrawn as an anchor tenant.
- Because the developer was counting on the Travel Plaza to finance early infrastructure (roundabout and traffic-mitigation improvements) and to begin generating tax increment, the project's financing path has been disrupted. No TIF application has been formally submitted.
- The TIF district is scheduled to expire November 2029. Commissioners indicated openness to retiring the existing district and initiating a new one if circumstances warrant, but that process has not begun.
- Developer representative Greg Morse (online) confirmed the project is NOT "dead on arrival" — the team is continuing to work with the County to resolve the challenges created by the Commissioners' decision.
- A rumored "quarry application" was referenced at a prior hearing; Planning confirms no such application has been received.
- Any future use of Tax Increment Financing will include a public process and be communicated through BMCC.

Bouquet Period

Bouquets were extended to the community members attending their first BMCC meeting, and to Mike (Bonner Mill site water operator) for his transparency and willingness to answer difficult questions on water use.

Public Comment

- **Workforce housing & TIF** — Concern that over-use of urban renewal districts / TIF can negatively impact general funds and first-responder capacity; encouraged the community to be well-informed about large developments (referenced prior Live Nation / Logjam situation).
- **Kat Key (Bonner Homes West HOA)** — Ms. Key reported the HOA board surveyed its neighborhood and received 30+ questions. Concerns shared by residents include property values, utility rates, power grid load, future data-center expansion, noise, water source and consumption, environmental impacts, proximity to school, and quality-of-life impacts on Bonner, Milltown East, and West Riverside. The HOA asked that County planners and Commissioners seriously consider these concerns before acting on the Special Exception permit.
- **Brett Taylor (East Missoula)** — Emphasized community investment is moral as well as financial, and asked who guarantees the permanence of an AI operation (a volatile industry) and how the project would improve quality of life for residents.
- **Gabrielle Flores (UM education student)** — Urged public servants and site owners to keep the adjacent school and its students/teachers/commuters front-of-mind throughout the review. Noted the school board meeting on April 14 at 6:00 PM is open to public comment.
- **Jim Grover** — Opposed to the project; characterized it as primarily benefiting a small number of out-of-state interests (applicant is Australian-based), with local harms concentrated in construction impacts and long-term environmental risk. Raised concerns for his young child's future.
- **Additional resident comment** — Watched the March Q&A and the current meeting; noted Crambo's public website advertises Western Montana as an available site since July 2025 and lists a 100 MW figure the applicant disavowed at the prior Q&A. Resides within the 500-foot radius; opposed to the project at this location.

Communications

- **Open Council Positions** — Applications for BMCC are open through May 1, 2026 at 3:00 PM. Two applications have been received for three open positions. Apply at: <https://boards.missoulacounty.us/application/>
- **Missoula County Comprehensive Plan Update** — Missoula County is in the beginning stages of developing a countywide comprehensive plan for unincorporated areas. The 1975 plan was last substantively updated in 2016 (amended 2019). The new update is expected to be a ~2-year process continuing into 2027. Engagement and input opportunities are posted at missoulacountyvoice.com/missoula-county-comprehensive-plan-update. Related materials are also shared on the BMCC Facebook page.

Treasurer's Report

- A PO Box renewal invoice of \$88 was received; Treasurer K. James is issuing a check. (Noted this type of expense will ordinarily be submitted to the County for direct payment going forward.) This check was placed on hold
- Current balance: \$0 – after last meeting when monies for Two Rivers
- Reminder: The County has assumed direct payment of community-council operating expenses. BMCC historically maintained a small budget (~\$500 toward the annual community picnic); going forward, bills are paid through the County.

Action Items

None.

Discussion Items

Train Quiet Zone (Jane Kipp)

A Missoulian article published February 2, 2026 confirmed that residents support a train quiet zone (particularly at Madison Street) but are unwilling to pay for implementation. A prior BMCC request for a countywide survey was declined by the County, although a similar request originating in the Rattlesnake neighborhood was accepted. BNSF's implementation costs continue to rise each year. No progress at this time.

Takeaway from Data Center Meeting (March)

The full recording of the March community meeting is available on YouTube (search "Bonner Data Center"). Thanks to the community member who filmed and posted at no charge.

City / Community Signage (John Wilke)

BMCC submitted a Rural Impact Grant application to the County (end of February) requesting highway signage for the unincorporated communities of Piltzville, West Riverside, and Pine Grove. An update is expected in the next 1–2 months (last year's comparable grant response arrived in early May). Signage for West Riverside, East Riverside, and other historical community boundaries has been largely lost since the fire department in Piltzville closed.

Workforce Housing (John Wilke)

On April 2, 2026, the Missoula County Commissioners approved a workforce-housing policy that had been in development for 9–10 months. Missoula County is believed to be the first county in Montana to formally define workforce housing (the state does not currently provide a definition). The policy creates two categories:

- **Sustainable housing** — non-subsidized housing with guardrails (increased density, reduced square footage) to reduce cost.

- **Affordable housing** — subsidized housing where a household pays no more than 30% of monthly income on housing costs.

The policy will shape TIF-supported housing projects in the pipeline, including the Westside Log Yard, Grand Creek Crossing (north end of Reserve), and another project incorporating housing. The draft remains available on the Missoula County Voice page.

MCCLUB Update – Town Pump Sign Variance DENIED (Rick Hall)

- **Decision** — The Missoula County Consolidated Land Use Board denied Town Pump's requested sign variance on a 7–2 vote against. The applicant sought to retain all nine existing non-compliant signs and reposition the sidewalk signs onto the building, citing customer navigation between the casino entrance and the fuel/store entrance. Staff analysis found the request failed five of the seven required findings for a variance — in particular, that the need must not be of the applicant's own making and that signs cannot exist solely to increase business. Existing non-conforming signs may remain in place under the prior grandfathered variance so long as they are not altered; modernization would require current-code compliance.
- **Billboard prohibition** — MCCLUB also approved — and the Board of County Commissioners ratified — a prohibition on new billboards in Missoula County, based on misalignment with adopted County plans and goals. Existing billboards may remain and be maintained but cannot be rebuilt once they deteriorate. BMCC has seen a rise in applications for electronic signage, some in traffic-sensitive locations (e.g., the Mullan Road/Reserve bridge approach), where testimony indicated safety concerns.
- **Board structure note** — Under recent state law, municipalities over 7,000 population have their own planning boards, so the former joint Missoula city/county body has been consolidated at the County level as MCCLUB — combining the Zoning Board of Adjustment (variances, special exceptions) with Planning & Zoning (subdivisions, plats). The City now has limited input over individual properties.

Next Meeting

Monday, May 11, 2026 at 7:00 PM — Hybrid Meeting at Bonner School and via Zoom.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Blackfoot Crossing
- Bonner Mill AI Center (Special Exception Permit Process – invite Crambo, Public Health, Water Quality District, DNRC, DEQ, and NorthWestern Energy/PSC as able)
- Open Council Positions
- Train Quiet Zone
- City / Community Signage (add additional signs)
- Milltown State Park – recreational river closures this summer and next (invite park manager and/or a Front Country Alliance representative)

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by E. Herndon; seconded J. Wilke. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.