DISTRICTS 10 & 11 MEETING MINUTES

JUNE 14, 2024 | DISTRICT 10 HOSTED | LAKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE, POLSON, MT

COUNTIES IN ATTENDANCE

District 10		District 11	
X	Flathead	X	Mineral
X	Lake	X	Missoula
X	Lincoln	X	Ravalli
X	Sanders		

CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE

Chair Holmquist called the meeting to order and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Deputy Director Rittal called the roll. There were quorums in both Districts; however, Ravalli County rolled in late and after roll was called. Guests included Senator Mike Cuffe, Senate District 1 and two pending and current Gold Partners attended including Ryan Napier, Chorus Innovations and Bill Lloyd, Great West Engineering.

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

Deputy Director Rittal described the new tiered partnership program. The tiers are Gold, Silver, and Sponsor. The Sponsor level provides a vendor booth at MACo Events. The Silver Level allows for more access to members as well as placement in MACo directory. The Gold Level gets invited to more MACo events and given the opportunity to address and interact with members directly at MACo events.

Pending and current Gold Partners: Montana State Fund; QCI; Arthur Gallagher Risk Management; Chorus Innovations; Great West Engineering; L3 Harris; Nextera; and Allegiance.

Pending and current Silver Partners: Black Mountain Software and Stahly Engineering.

Pending and current Sponsors: First Call Computer Solutions and Musco Lighting.

Each Gold Partner was given a few minutes to introduce their program to members.

DISTRICT BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes

Chair Holmquist called for a motion to consider approval of the minutes from last year's meeting. Flathead County Commissioner Brad Abell moved to approve which was seconded by Flathead County Commissioner Randy Brodehl. There was no discussion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Next MACo District Meeting – 2025

Missoula County in District 11 volunteered to host the 2025 meeting.

District Chair/Vice Chair Elections – District 11

Commissioner Strohmaier (current chair) and Commissioner Dan Huls (current vice chair) were nominated to serve as District Chair and Vice Chair respectively. There being no further nominations or objections, Commissioners Strohmaier and Huls were re-elected by acclamation.

MACo Officer Nominations – 2nd Vice President

Chair Holmquist called for nominations for MACO's 2nd Vice President. This year's 2nd VP would serve during a legislative year. Ravalli County Commissioner Greg Chilcott nominated Yellowstone County Commissioner Mark Morse.

There being no further nominations, MACo Staff concluded the discussion by stating that nominations would remain open until the closing business session at the Annual Conference in September.

MACo PRESIDENT'S & OFFICERS' REPORTS

President Butcher expressed gratitude for being selected to serve as MACo president. He stated the MACo has done its job representing local government and going into the 2025 session, the membership needs to be all hands-on deck because legislators want to hear from county commissioners. He underscored that it is essential that MACo maintain the spirit of working together and cohesiveness. President Butcher also expressed appreciation in how responsive MACo is to the requests of its members, creating two new positions to provide more member services.

Urban County Representative Brodehl thanked President Butcher for his leadership. He underscored the importance of building relationships and having discussions with legislators prior to the beginning of the session. Counties should be educating legislators on property taxes and county budgeting caps.

Immediate Past President Zylawy echoed previous comments, stating that legislators need to understand what happens on the ground, in relation to county budgets. He agrees this next session is going to be a difficult session for county governments.

MACo MCT UPDATE

IT Manager King provided an update on services her program offers. One complimentary service is a Telecommunications Cost Reduction Analysis which is a comprehensive analysis of telecommunications and internet provider costs to reduce those costs to counties. MCT also can assist with .GOV migration and offers affordable solutions for county email security. Additionally, CJIS updated its policies and MCT will be sponsoring a Tech Talk in early August to discuss those updates.

She also informed members of a cybersecurity grant opportunity. The State received federal grant money and 80% of those funds were to go to local governments. The State procured an end point protection provider, Sentinel One, with the intent that local governments would be into it for end point protection. The grant provides free services for the first year but each subsequent year, counties would be required to increase budgets for the cost of end point protection.

Overall goal is to get members into a position where PCT could offer cybersecurity coverage again. The cybersecurity grant opportunities would assist counties in getting baseline cybersecurity measures (e.g. MFA and end point protection) in place, which in turn would assist the pool in seeking cybersecurity coverage.

MACo UPDATES & FY 2025 BUDGET

Staffing, Programs & Services

Executive Director Bryson updated the group on MACo Operations. PCT Trust Administrator Shannon Chamberlain resigned, effective the end of June. He expressed gratitude to counties for their flexibility and accommodation for renewals. He further stated that PCT Trust Administrator Chamberlain will be sorely missed, and her departure is significant to the organization. MACo is in the process of recruiting for her position.

In the past two years, MACo has brought on two positions that have had significant impacts to the budget. One of those positions is the Cybersecurity/IT Manager. That position is grant-funded and expected to generate revenue based on the services MCT offers to counties. The second position is Government Finance Director, which is used to fill the void created when the Local Government Services Bureau at Department of Administration stopped offering technical assistance. The proposed budget builds this position into dues, based on the same formula used to calculate dues.

For HCT Members, GASB 75 OPEB calculations can be done for free or at a reduced rate, depending on county size.

Executive Director Bryson indicated that in 2024 MACo did not conduct a salary survey. The goal of the survey was to give members information related to costs of personnel across the board. Members indicated that the information was useful but was also a double-edged sword.

Executive Director Bryson asked for interest in an Alternative Energy Summit, which would bring industry and counties together to share resources related to issues such as tax abatement, road haul agreements, permitting, and zoning. There was general interest. Likely, this Summit would be in Eastern Montana in the next year or two.

FY 2025 Proposed Budget

Executive Director Bryson summarized MACo's FY 2025 preliminary budget, which the Board of Directors will review for final adoption at the end of June. Overall, the budget shows a 1.43% increase. The budget document shows a reduction of 1.0 FTE. Chris Holling retired, and her position was not filled. Budget also includes a 3.41% cost of living adjustment. The budget appears structurally unbalanced but does not take into consideration investment income. MACo should break even. He is hopeful that the partnership program will build good relationships, especially with the Gold Partners.

HB 890 Compliance

Associate General Counsel Alley walked through an updated MACo White Paper on recording and posting meetings in compliance with HB 890 (2023). Beginning July 1, 2024, counties will need to comply with audio/video recording and posting meetings. Department of Administration released draft rules, but those rules provide technical specifications and not guidelines on what constitutes a "meeting" subject to the audio/video recording requirements. A robust discussion followed with questions regarding what constitutes a meeting; posting notice so that members of the public are aware they may be recorded; and the possible need to involve the county attorney on a case-by-case basis.

PRIMARY ELECTION AND PENDING LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Deputy Director Rittal reported that, following the primary election, he anticipates 15-20 new commissioners statewide. He also reported that two county commissioners have recently passed, Rem Mannix (Powell County)

and Lee Humbert (Daniels County). He also stated that 12 counties will be underdoing the local government review.

Deputy Director Rittal opened with strategy for the 2025 session. His recommendation is that MACo is going back to the basics and back to working from MACo policies. MACo staff will not invest time to fix bad bills. He hopes to have two commissioners in the Capitol each week of session and intends for commissioners to be the voice for the Association. Lobbying Staff (Rittal, Bryson, Alley) will be in the Capitol to assist as necessary but the primary voice will be commissioners.

As far as hot button issues: Deputy Director Rittal anticipates property tax relief and some form of SB 511 to return. There is not much appetite for a sales tax in Montana. Historically, MACo has supported the concept. There is a shift in thinking about a Local Option Sales Tax, targeting just tourist goods, with the idea to buy down the 95 mills.

Commissioner Holmquist reflected on her experience on the Governor's Property Tax Task Force. She has been grateful to learn more about state and school budgeting but does not understand where the narrative that counties are flush with money is coming from. She indicated that likely bills coming out of the Tax Force are a homestead/comstead exemption and a form of SB 511.

BREAK FOR LUNCH (Thank you Lake County for lunch!)

LAND USE UPDATE

Associate General Counsel Alley reported on the recent district court case out of Broadwater County, which has impacted the use of exempt wells in development. She indicated she was working with DNRC, DEQ, and MLCT on an agency coordination bill that would hopefully be a legislative fix to the issues raised within the case.

PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATE

Public Safety Risk Manager O'Malley stated that fentanyl is making its way into jails. Mail going to MSP is now being scanned and inmates are receiving scanned copies of their correspondence. Mail scanning is also available to county facilities through telecom providers. He reported that Lexipol updates are still being rolled out and body scanners have been useful in keep illegal materials out of jails.

MEMBERSHIP DISCUSSION

Executive Director Bryson briefly discussed costs of juvenile detention and indicated the Board of Crime Control supported a budget increase for juvenile detention funding and is requesting an increase in the executive budget.

Executive Director Bryson stated that traditionally, MACo brings 15-25 pieces of legislation. In the 2025 session, MACo's strategy will be to play defense. Kill bad bills and support good bills. The best way to do that is to shore up MACo policy statements and focus in on issues that impact counties the most.

Land Transfers Authorized in The Montana Water Rights Protection Act

Lake County Commissioner Gale Decker made a short presentation related to the Montana Water Rights Protection Act. He indicated that Governor has requested that discussions regarding land trades should begin.

The Act requires prioritizing exchanges with private lands and those exchanges go through the Montana Land Board.

Resolution & Policy Recommendations for Committee

None were brought forward.

SB 536 UPDATE

HRG Engineering staff was onsite to discuss its bridge study and to discuss each county's bridge priorities. Each county was encouraged to meet with HRG Engineering before leaving or to set up a meeting with them in the near future to discuss those priorities.

MACo staff departed to embark on the journey to their next destination. The Montana Department of Transportation and their Consulting Team took over to talk about the Federal Lands Access Program and STIP as well as the off-system bridge study and implementation plan.