

**Rocky Mountain Development Council, Inc.**  
**Board of Directors' Meeting**  
**January 22, 2026**  
**Neighborhood Center Card Room/Zoom Conference Call**

**Rocky Board Members present:** Katelyn Buck, Dannai Clayborn, Bruce Day, Susan Geise, Paula Jacques, Trever Kirkland, Cory Kirsch, Teri Lilletvedt, Erin Lyndes, Dan Rispens, Jesse Swenson

**Rocky Board Members absent:** Kate Anderson, Debbie Havens, Andy Hunthausen, Charlie Lane

**Policy Council Members present:** Maureen Bjerke, Katelyn Buck, Regan Clifton, Tabitha Creason, Marie Hazlitt, Austin Kuhn, Trisha Sullivan

**Others present:** Signe Ask, Hayden Behm, Beth Branam, MacKenzie Chatriand, Mindy Diehl, Diane Edgar, Steven Ferriter, John Gorton, Joanna Halland, Jaymie Hazel, Taya Hovan, Mollee Jones, Lori Ladas, Jean Leischner, Angela Lunda, Samara Lynde, Liz Mogstad, Kelley Moody, Ashley Peña-Larsen, Jonathan Schmitz, Nicole Silverthorne, Dave Sorenson, Lizzie Thompson

**Call to Order/Roll Call:** The joint Rocky Board and Head Start Policy Council meeting was called to order at 3:02 p.m. No public comment was presented.

**Head Start Update – Ashley Peña-Larsen**

Ashley reported that Head Start held its RIOT (Reading Instead of Technology) kickoff this month and it should increase the in-kind totals for the program. An in-kind update will be provided to the Board next month. Teacher waivers have been approved. Ashley noted that Head Start has vacant positions in both Townsend and Helena, along with several staff members who need a reduction in hours. As a result, she proposed a change where a Head Start classroom would be closed in East Helena, with the 11 children impacted moving to other classrooms within the program. While a mid-year shift is disruptive, this adjustment should allow the program to reduce the number of classroom closures currently happening. The number of children served by the program would not be reduced; rather, the classroom licenses would just be adjusted to allow more children per class. Ashley said with the support of the Board and Policy Council, staff would be notified of this change tomorrow and impacted families would be notified soon after. The budget looks good. Ashley is meeting with Budget Analyst MacKenzie Chatriand to review projections, and the budget should break even at the end of the grant year.

**For Policy Council, Austin Kuhn made the motion to approve the Head Start Director's Program and Budget report. Tabitha Creason seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**For the Rocky Board, Erin Lyndes made the motion to approve the Head Start Director's Program and Budget report. Bruce Day seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**ERSEA Policies and Procedures – Jaymie Hazel**

Jaymie provided the annual ERSEA training for Policy Council and Board members. This training provided an overview on how Head Start determines, verifies, and documents eligibility for

applicants. Key points highlighted were initial interviews with the family, methods for verification of a child's age and eligibility, and the creation and documentation of eligibility records.

Jaymie spoke about the Head Start Recruitment Plan, which has not changed since last year. She noted that recruitment is the responsibility of everyone, including Head Start families, staff, Policy Council, and the Rocky Board. Jaymie reported that Head Start has already completed 12 applications for the upcoming year, which exceeds the January goal of five.

**For Policy Council, Tabitha Creason made the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Recruitment Plan. Austin Kuhn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**For the Rocky Board, Dan Rispens made the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Recruitment Plan. Susan Geise seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

Jaymie presented the Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment and Class Placement Policy and Procedure. She noted that eligibility criteria is based on the needs of the community, and once a child is determined to be categorically eligible for Head Start, a point system is used to determine which children receive placement in the program. One change to the policy this year was the addition of points for parents currently employed by Head Start, to help with employee retention. The other notable change was the members of the Enrollment Team, as the ERSEA Specialist position was eliminated and its duties distributed among other listed Head Start staff positions.

**For Policy Council, Tabitha Creason made the motion to approve the Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment, and Class Placement Policy and Procedure. Austin Kuhn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**For the Rocky Board, Bruce Day made the motion to approve the Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment, and Class Placement Policy and Procedure. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

Jaymie reviewed the Attendance Policy and Procedure. No changes were made to this document. She spoke about how Head Start needs to maintain a monthly average daily attendance rate of 85%, and that causes of absenteeism will be analyzed if the attendance rate drops below that percentage. Jaymie also highlighted the progression of steps taken when a child is absent without program notification, including calls to the family, home visits, letters, speaking with emergency contacts, and wellness checks. This document was initially created by the Policy Council and establishes a proactive and preventative approach to maintaining the safety of children in the program.

**For Policy Council, Austin Kuhn made the motion to approve the Attendance Policy and Procedure. Tabitha Creason seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**For the Rocky Board, Susan Geise made the motion to approve the Attendance Policy and Procedure. Paula Jacques seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

#### **2026-2027 Head Start Grant and Budget – Ashley Peña-Larsen**

Ashley presented information regarding the 2026-2027 Head Start continuation grant. The grant proposal maintains the current enrollment of 125 students, while increasing the classroom sizes to

17 or 18 children per classroom. A recent change to childcare licensing allows for this increase in classroom size. No other changes to the grant proposal have been made since it was discussed with the Policy Council and Board last month. The proposed changes in classroom size will allow for additional staff support in classrooms, along with an additional coach and supervisor in the Head Start program. The Head Start grant totals \$3,106,701 in federal funds, with approximately two-thirds of that funding used for personnel and fringe expenses. USDA provides an additional \$129,730 in federal funding. Network and rent are the other major expenses of the program, with additional items in the budget including supplies, insurance, and meal costs. The budget includes \$776,676 of in-kind. A small portion of that total is received through space donated to the program, but the majority is dependent on parents, professional services, and volunteers. Friends of Head Start also contributes to the in-kind total. Head Start receives \$27,000 for training expenses. Ashley noted that paperwork requirements for the grant are reduced this year, but both Policy Council and the Rocky Board will be part of the Head Start review scheduled for April.

**For Policy Council, Tabitha Creason made the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Head Start Grant and Budget. Austin Kuhn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**For the Rocky Board, Erin Lyndes made the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Head Start Grant and Budget. Bruce Day seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

The Policy Council meeting was adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

**Susan Geise made the motion to approve the December 18, 2025, Board of Directors' meeting minutes, and the November 20, 2025, Finance Committee meeting minutes. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Director's Report – Lori Ladas**

Lori introduced John Gorton, newly hired Program Director for Rocky Aging Services. Rocky has received its first quarter CSBG allocation and is expecting an increase in CSBG funding this year based on census information. Lori noted that Beth Branam attended the most recent “coffee chat” with lobbyist David Bradley, and the update was optimistic, with no cuts expected for Rocky programs.

#### **General Fiscal Update – Lori Ladas and Jonathan Schmitz**

Cash balance is \$2,564,356, which is higher than last month. The increase is due to multiple factors, including recent Head Start and AmeriCorps federal draws, along with a \$55,000 donation from the Wall Family Foundation. Lori reported that half of the county mill funding for the year from Lewis and Clark and Broadwater counties has been received. Accounts payable balance is \$28,474.99.

Jonathan provided an overview of the financial statements as of November 30, 2025. He noted the narrative document included with the statements, which provides program-specific updates impacting the Rocky budget. The financial statements reflect that Rocky's financial position remains relatively stable since the start of the fiscal year. Rocky maintains 1.95 months of cash on hand. As of November 30, the budget showed excess revenue of \$115,546, which is a positive variance of \$210,137 compared to the projection. Three programs provided most of that excess

revenue, including General & Admin, Preschool, and Affordable Housing. Jonathan mentioned the in-kind line item, which is connected to Head Start and will continue to be monitored as the year progresses.

**Strategic Plan Update – Lori Ladas**

Lori referenced the Strategic Plan document included in Board packets, noting the workplan status updates for items projected to be completed in 2025. She reported that some parts of the strategic plan may be revisited in upcoming months to align with the state work plan, which was just submitted and will likely be presented to the Board in February.

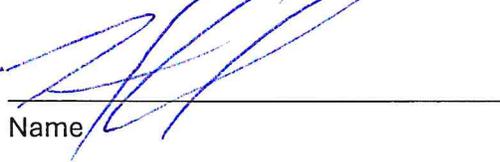
The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Diane Edgar  
Executive Assistant

Approved by the Board of Directors:

  
Name  
Date