

Flathead Reservation Water Management Board

PO Box 37, Ronan, MT 59864 | contact@frwmb.gov | (406) 201-2532

Date: DRAFT October 03, 2023

To: Tom McDonald, Tribal Chairman of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Greg Gianforte, Governor of the State of Montana

RE: Request to enter into planning and funding discussions for the Tribes and the State to fund and construct a water right office for the Flathead Reservation Water Management Board and its Office of the Water Engineer

As is known, the water right compact entered into by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT or Tribes), the State of Montana, and the federal government designates the Flathead Reservation Water Management Board (FRWMB or Board) as the water right administrative body for the Flathead Reservation. As a part of the negotiated settlement, the Board is charged to be separate and independent from Tribal, State, and federal governments in their role of administering water rights and water uses on the Reservation. The FRWMB and its Office of the Engineer began at a starting point of zero infrastructure as of the Effective Date. Beyond the laws set forth in the Compact and the Unitary Management Ordinance, the FRWMB and its Office of the Engineer, which are defined as a government instrumentality, was created with no existing bylaws, personnel policies, human resource services, payroll services, IT services, computers/file networks, office supplies/furniture, employees, employee benefits, benefit management services, websites, logos/branding, structured database for managing water rights, final water right forms and policies, or any other policy or infrastructure typically enjoyed by a government office with a longer permanence. Due to an essential need for the FRWMB and the Office of the Engineer to remain independent from the Tribes, the State, and the federal government, those existing entities have remained distanced and unwilling to pool or share integrated government infrastructure, benefit groups, and other operational resources. This has so far included office space, which is the topic of this communication as the FRWMB and its Office of the Water Engineer currently rent office space on the open-market in an office space limited market and as a result are in need of a longer term solution for a stable office space where water administration can occur in perpetuity. Such a solution is currently unfunded.

FRWMB Funding:

The Board and its Office came with funding from the State and the Tribes in an amount totaling \$1,126,151.00 per year for July-June 2023 and 2024 periods intended to cover recurring operational costs of payroll, rent, utilities, Board expenses, supplies, and other recurring operational costs and services. A one-time startup costs amount of \$185,000 was included with the 2023 funding package.

Current Office Situation:

Currently, the Board and its Office of the Engineer rent space at 400 Main Street SW in Ronan in a portion of a historic corner lot that was once a Masonic Lodge. The Lease runs from May 15, 2022 to May 14, 2025 and is currently \$2,100/month for the second year, increasing to \$2,250/month for the thirds year.

The facility, in its current conditions, is woefully inadequate for FRWMB office space needs. Layout includes two front offices, a shared entry area, and auditorium, an upstairs loft, and two unisex residential style bathrooms. The building lacks sound isolated office space needed for current and full staff buildout. The auditorium is insufficient for larger meetings and must co-house office workstations. The windows, heating system, and other utilities are antiquated, and an absence of insulation and air cooling make for excessively hot summer working conditions, cold winter working conditions, and high utilities. There is no off-street or controlled parking for a staff vehicles or an office-owned vehicle which will be an essential need for the Office of the Water Engineer to complete it mission. There is inadequate storage for field equipment. The building is not ADA accessible. The office is limited to five workstations, most of which suffer from sound carry during phone, teams, and in-person meetings.

The Board and staff have updated some building features, which constitute capital investments that will not be recovered upon termination of a lease arrangement:

- essential low voltage/WIFI infrastructure needed for internet and phone connections;
- sound deadening drapes in the auditorium;
- exterior awnings to reduce window front solar gain and provide snow shelter
- repairs electric and conversion to LED lighting

- minor security updates
- window treatments for insulation, privacy, and light management

Generally, the Board has explored, but been reluctant to approve larger upgrades to the rented office space. Minimum needs include:

- \$70,000 for mini split air handlers and air filtration for existing heater;
- \$27,000 for commercial window upgrades;
- \$unknown for ADA compliance; and
- \$unknown for commercial door upgrades.

FRWMB and Office of the Water Engineer Needs:

The FRWMB and the Office of the Engineer need a building that generally meets the following specifications:

- Entry and reception area workstation with printer/mail handling area;
- Five individual offices for staff with separate enclosures;
- One conference office for the Water Engineer;
- One large meeting room with kitchenette area on the side;
- Controlled climate document storage;
- Two-car garage for office vehicle, field equipment, and water measuring fabrication;
- Network equipment rack cabinet and low voltage/Wi-Fi network throughout;
- Modern air handling and insulations;
- Parking for a minimum of 15;
- ADA compliance facilities;
- Security system – doors, glass breakage, cameras, et.; and
- Two unisex bathrooms and one shower.

Conclusion:

The Board would like to work with the Parties to the Compact to explore options to achieve a better and long-term office space solution for the Board and its Office. Options might include purchasing and renovating existing office space, acquiring bare land and building a new building, or co-habituating grounds/compounds currently occupied by one or more of the Parties to the

Compact. We would be happy to meet in-person or communicate via letter or email about options. We look forward to working together to solve this essential need that will help to assure long-term stability and success toward water management and administration for all citizens of the Flathead Reservation.

Please forward your response to FRWMB Chairman, Clayton Matt and FRWMB Vice Chairman, Roger A Noble by email at contact@frwmb.gov or via mail to PO Box 37, Ronan, MT 59864

Sincerely,

_____ Date: _____

FRWMB Chair, Clayton Matt:

_____ Date: _____

FRWMB Vice Chair, Roger A Noble: