

Citizen Conservation Board (CCB)

DRAFT Regular Board Meeting Minutes

June 10, 2021; 4:30 PM

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

Board Members Present (8 out of 14 members required for a quorum):

- 1) Diana Hammer, Chair
- 2) Valerie Stacey, Vice Chair
- 3) Becca Boslough
- 4) Ann Brodsky
- 5) Elizabeth Grant
- 6) Lucy Lantz
- 7) Denise Roth Barber
- 8) Makenna Sellers, also carrying Mark Juedeman's proxy
- 9) Brian Solan

Board Members Not Present:

Steven Costle (excused)
Patricia Heiser
Mark Juedeman, Vice Chair (excused)
Carlin Onstad
Richard Sloan (excused)

City Staff Present:

Chris Daly, City Arborist
Patrick Judge, Sustainability Coordinator

Others Present:

Tasha Grant, Interested Citizen
Dr. Gregory Thomas, Interested Citizen

Call to Order:

CCB Chair Diana Hammer called the meeting to order at 4:33 pm and welcomed all participants. She also thanked Patrick Judge for his service as Sustainability Coordinator. He had recently announced that he had accepted a position at Carroll College, and will be departing the City on June 30.

Minutes:

Denise Roth Barber moved adoption of the May 13, 2021 minutes. Brian Solan seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Guest Speaker – Chris Daly, City Arborist

Diana introduced Chris Daly, who has worked for the City for seven years. He runs the urban forestry program, which is housed in the Parks Department.

In his presentation and in response to questions, Chris made the following points:

- His job involves maintaining and expanding Helena's urban forest environment, including boulevard trees, trees in City parks, and tree projects for other departments. His crew is not involved in thinning or other projects on Mount Helena, the South Hills, etc. These fall under the Open Space division (Brad Langsather).

- Part of Chris's job is implementing Helena's "Urban Forest Management Plan," which specifies that every tree should get pruning attention at least once every seven years. The pruning routes used to be largely reactive (responding to calls about hazards, etc.), but the Department has now been able to take a more proactive approach. He is pleased that the program is almost caught-up with their schedule, and that they are now striving to replace trees within a week of removal. Ann applauded his efforts, and likened professional tree trimming to "a good haircut" that can enhance the aesthetics and health of trees.
- Chris is able to achieve significant cost savings by purchasing "bare root" trees in bulk. He is hoping to plant ~300 trees this year, boosted in part by the CCB/Growing Friends/High School 6th Ward project. He's excited that the project could become the basis for a DNRC grant that could support that type of work over the next 3 years.
- When planting new boulevard trees, the City asks adjacent landowners to sign a 3-year water agreement. Access to plentiful water is crucial for trees, especially in the juvenile stages when they haven't yet developed deep root systems.
- It's always unfortunate to have to remove trees, but the Department always plants more trees than they remove in a given year (~300 vs ~60). It's been a rough year, with high wind events (one of them downing a ~100-year-old Spruce tree at the Civic Center) and the recent (and very-late-in-the-season) severe storm event. Also, another Spruce needs to be removed at Grandstreet Theater to allow for the installation of a new air-conditioning unit.
- Chris spoke to his philosophy – that he cares deeply for Helena's environment, and sees his mission as working to improve upon it for future generations, just as earlier generations did for us. His work is funded through a property tax assessment, and he is very cognizant of the need to provide maximum value for the taxpayers. We all benefit from projects in the greater community.
- One of his top priorities is increasing the diversity of trees, both from a species- and age-perspective. Helena has many Green Ash trees of approximately the same age. These are vulnerable to a borer beetle infestation.
- He has had good success with Norway Maple. Some of his peers don't love that tree (considering it "invasive") because it puts out a lot of seed and can spread easily (like Russian Olive). But that's more of a problem in places like Washington and Oregon. In Montana, you almost need a tree like that for it to survive the challenging climate.
- When asked about climate change, Chris thinks that most of our trees will continue to do well as background temperatures climb. We are on the colder edge of the climate zone for these trees. But the bigger concern, in his opinion, is the increasing frequency of erratic and severe weather events like the recent cold snap & snow dump.
- "Water is the #1 medicine for trees." He advised watering to "greater depth with less frequency" to encourage root growth. He recommends "about 20 gallons per caliper inch."
- Ideally, pruning should be done when trees are dormant (late fall / winter). Elm trees should not be pruned between May and October. Maples can be pruned once they've leafed out.
- Chris expanded on some other trees they're using for the boulevards: Lindens, Dutch-Elm-Resistant Elms, Lewis & Clark Expedition Elms, Tatarian Maples, Honeylocust, Sensation Box Elder (which is actually a softwood Maple - it doesn't get the bugs, or drop seeds, and you can even get syrup from it, as you can with Birch trees!).
- When asked about obstacles he faces, Chris stated that the urban forestry program has made a lot of good progress in the area of public outreach and education. In the past, people often focused on fears around potential impacts to sidewalks, etc. People are now better informed and more aware of the many benefits provided by trees.
- Diana pointed out that low-income neighborhoods often have far less tree-cover. Her "iTree" analysis showed that the 6th Ward has about half the canopy as the Mansion District (12.5% vs. 25%).

- Chris said he'd be happy to answer any additional questions, meet with other groups, etc. He can be reached at: cdaly@helenamt.gov
- The group thanked Chris for his time, as he rushed off to respond to a wind-related dispatch call!

Energy & Transportation Committee:

Makenna Sellers gave an update on the "Solarize Helena" project, including the following points:

- On June 7th, Sleeping Giant Citizens Council hosted a "Solarize 101" webinar. It drew significant interest, with ~90 who registered and ~55 who attended. The recording is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcDXAQjomdI>
- As described in last month's CCB meeting, the idea behind Solarize is to overcome common obstacles to rooftop solar adoption. It helps provide a "social-catalyst", troubleshooting assistance, education, information about financing and other tools to encourage people to go forward.
- The campaign is off to a great start, with two dozen homeowners having already signed-up for a S.H. site assessment. These will be performed by Solar Montana, the local business that was selected as the official S.H. installer after a competitive process.
- It's great that a couple of other communities in Montana are also moving through the process this year – Lewistown & Glendive.
- The goal is to get 8-12 projects completed in Helena by year-end, with more to come next year.
- \$60,000 of additional funding is proposed for Helena's Zero Interest Loan Program in the FY2022 draft budget. It's a little unclear how much money is currently available in the fund. Pat offered to check-in with Michael McConnell in Community Development.

In other news, Pat reported that Mark Juedeman did indeed attend the May 17 City Commission meeting to offer his support for the 2018 International Energy Conservation Code. He was speaking only for himself, but conveyed to the Commission that the CCB may also weigh in on the topic prior to the final hearing on May 21.

Tree Planting Team:

No report this time, other than what was covered in Chris Daly's presentation (see above).

Outreach & Communications Committee:

Elizabeth Grant reported that the Committee was unable to meet in May, but will be meeting again soon. Brian Solan is working on a policy for how the "Com Com" will interact with the other committees and the CCB as a whole.

Water Conservation Committee:

Valerie Stacey and Diana Hammer reported the following:

- The committee concluded its Water Wise Workshop series. All three sessions were recorded, and will now be edited and posted for public viewing.
- The committee's next task is to organize the Water Wise Garden Tour. The tour will showcase some great examples water-conscious lawns, gardens, and landscaping in the Helena area.
- In addition, Valerie Stacey is finishing the "Water Wise Booklet." Thanks to financial support from the Water Quality Protection District, eight-thousand copies of the report are being printed through the Independent Record. (That quantity is the minimum print-run, and comes at a cost of just \$800. Newsprint was also thought to be environmentally superior to bleached card stock.) In addition, the booklet will be available electronically.

Waste & Recycling Committee:

- Ann Brodsky reported that the next step (once the budget is adopted) will be to issue an RFP for a consultant to prepare the Strategic Plan for Waste Reduction. The current draft of the budget includes

a \$60,000 line item for this purpose. Ann and the committee have been working on language for the RFP.

- Denise Rother Barber reported that she and others are working on a grant application through EPA. The funding would go toward extending composting service to schools and other entities not currently served by the residential curbside program offered by 406 Compost.
- The Waste Committee will be meeting again this coming Tuesday (June 15, 5:00 pm).

-- At 5:26, Pat Judge dropped off the call. --

-- The following notes were taken by Val Stacey and Diana Hammer. --

Draft Letter with Recommendations to Commission re: City Budget, Sustainability Coordinator Position, and Energy Conservation Code:

- Diana shared her screen, showing the Version of the Draft Letter she shared with the CCB and then also showing another Version of the Draft Letter, revised by Ann Brodsky. Denise moved that the CCB continue the discussion using the version of the Draft Letter with Ann's suggestions. Makenna seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.
- After some discussion, Denise moved and Brian seconded that Diana and Ann (and any others who may be interested) finalize the letter and have Diana sign and send to the Mayor and Commissioners, with a cc: to the City Manager and Sustainability Coordinator. The motion passed unanimously.

Emerging Issues / Other Business / Announcements / Public Testimony:

- Diana encouraged each of the Committees to be thinking of any best practices and policies that the CCB should be recommending to the Commission. For instance, are there best practices around lighting upgrades, waste reduction at community events, water conservation, or others to promote?
- Diana invited anyone on the call, including the public, to share any other comments or questions they might have. There was no public comment.

Next Meeting:

Diana announced that the next regular CCB meeting will take place Thursday, July 8 at 4:30 pm via Zoom. Please contact her with any agenda items.

Adjourn:

With no further comment from the board, staff, or public, Diana adjourned the meeting at 6:05 pm.

Minutes prepared by Patrick Judge, Valerie Stacey, and Diana Hammer.