



# **CITY OF HELENA**

## **State of City Address**

January 10, 2022  
Mayor Wilmot Collins

Good evening, ladies, and gentlemen, and welcome to the annual State of the City Address. The City Charter states:

“The mayor shall communicate to the city commission and to the general public, a statement of the affairs and management of the city, each January, and may make recommendations regarding these matters.”

Our City Charter was adopted in 1976 and it states, “Helena, Montana, is the proud seat of our state government. It is a community with a colorful past and a vibrant future. There is an openness and basic decency that beckons each of our citizens to contribute to its unique identity.”

This beautiful city is governed by a diverse, hard-working city commission.

I want to thank and recognize all city employees for all they’ve done to contribute to the success of this city, thank you.

The city commission and city staff are two parts that make the city what it is. However, we could not accomplish all we do without the various advisory boards. I want to recognize the members of the various advisory boards; they give hundreds of hours of free time to make this City run. We thank you. I also want to especially recognize the members of the Helena Citizens’ Council (HCC). This City Commission sincerely appreciates all your hard work.

In addition to the efforts of all who work within the City organization, the City values those who work tirelessly to make our Community grow. It is time we acknowledge the fact that Helena has a thriving business community;

therefore, we must support those policies and initiatives that will continue to develop a strong and diverse economy.

It is very important that we recognize the day-to-day work of the City and not take it for granted. We've continued to deliver essential services to our community of Helena: plowing the streets, fixing potholes, responding to emergency calls, patrolling the community, collecting garbage, etc. However, I also want to recognize several accomplishments from 2021:

**Tonight, I would like to share with you the accomplishments achieved despite the many challenges of 2021. As well as, the ongoing projects the City government is implementing to realize the Commission's Strategic Outcomes in 2022.**

### **CITY MANAGER 2021 Accomplishments**

- Continued responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, through each of its variants including completion of services to the community with marginal impacts to the community.
- Completed over 300 community meetings with organizations and stakeholders in the community to increase access to the City Manager and share what has gone well or needs improvement.
- Implemented a Communications and Engagement Program including the launch of Be Heard Helena increasing citizen input on key issues citywide.
- Adopted a balanced FY2022 budget on time including the implementation of a citywide Work Plan to communicate work funded and completion of that work in alignment with the Commission's Strategic Objectives.
- Completed the Fiscal Stability Analysis, developed three-year stability plan and began implementation.
- Hired the Public Works Director, Human Resources Director, and Fire Chief.
- Launched an Economic Development recruitment tool that includes Helena specific details, and videos sharing what it is like to live, work, and enjoy Helena.

## **2022 Goals**

- Hire a Community Development Director, Police Chief, and Parks Director.
- Integrate employee climate survey results into strategies that set Helena apart as an employer of choice.
- Stabilize staffing in all departments.
- Maintain minimal interruptions to services in the community based on changes in COVID-19, weather, and other unforeseen elements.
- Implement spending of federal stimulus dollars in response to COVID-19.
- Complete the FY2022 Work Plan and establish a Strategic Plan with the City Commission beyond the FY2022 budget.

## **CITY ATTORNEY**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The City Attorney's Office was able to grow its staffing to better serve the City and its residents. Additional staff and promotion of existing City employees allowed the City to provide more research and advice on requests for legal opinion, take an active role in Helena's DUI Court implementation, and free up the City Attorney to focus on high-level advice needed by the City.
- Improved efficiency by implementing cloud storage and digital workflow of internal documents, including digital agreement review and execution.
- Contracted with a new software provider to streamline and improve prosecution services and continue the implementation of a paperless criminal justice system.
- Implemented a pilot deferred prosecution program to reduce strain on the court docket.
- The City Attorney's Office also assisted in negotiating a franchise for a new triple play provider, expanding Helena residents' options when it comes to internet, TV, and phone.

### **2022 Goals**

- This year the City Attorney's Office will continue to explore expanded prosecution-based victim services and a misdemeanor probation

program that will make completion of court mandated treatment and counseling economically feasible for defendants.

- Additionally, the City Attorney's Office will work to complete records retention review of records that are almost 60 years old.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Building Division processed over 400 building and building related permits this part year, resulting in:
  - \$22 million + in construction for new and remodeled single-family homes.
  - More than \$27 million in multifamily construction
  - \$114 million + in commercial construction.
  - Notable projects this year were the new buildings for the State Historical Museum and new construction of the Shodair facilities and the completion of the Seeley building.
- The City received a CARES CDBG grant for \$607,000 to assist the YWCA in the rehabilitation and remodel of their facility.
- The Housing Trust was established and funded \$1.9 million.
- The City received a Planning grant and is working with our partners of Our Redeemers Lutheran Church, Habitat for Humanity; Rocky Mountain Development Council; YWCA and Trust Montana to create over 100 affordable housing units on the church property.

### **2022 Goals**

- Fund the City's first project through the Housing Trust Fund
- Launch our Single-Family Home Rehabilitation program
- Complete our first Neighborhood Plan

## **FACILITIES**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Community Facilities Department was busy in 2021, helping to keep City buildings open and safe during the pandemic.
- Facilities staff led the efforts to improve and reconfigure the Law & Justice Center for Police Department Administration offices and Sheriff/Coroner's Offices.

## **2022 Goals**

- The Facilities Department is working on hiring an engineering firm to perform a study on current energy efficiency at all City facilities. The City's goal is to make all facilities 50% energy efficient by 2026.
- The Department will continue designing changes to the North City-County Building parking lot to better comply with ADA regulations. The project is expected to begin in early summer of 2022.

## **FINANCE AND UTILITY SERVICES**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Finance Department was busy in 2021 helping to deliver a comprehensive Budget Document for FY22, focused on the Commission's strategic objectives and Department work plan. Staff also developed meaningful budget and reserve policies that are guiding our efforts toward financial resiliency.
- The Finance department is leading two major technology upgrades that will improve efficiencies as well as customer experience. The Department started the process of replacing the City's Enterprise Resource Planning software. The Utility Services team is also working on rolling out a new billing portal for customers to view and pay utility bills online.

### **2022 Goals**

- In 2022, the Finance Department is focused on continuing efforts with process improvements, developing and revising critical policies and procedures.
- The Budget staff will help administer roughly \$8.4 million in ARPA funds.
- The Finance Department is developing a new capital improvement plan that is policy driven and prioritizes critical infrastructure to best meet the needs of the city. We will incorporate this new plan in our Fiscal Year 2023 budget process.

## **FIRE**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Helena Fire Department was incredibly busy in 2021, answering 4,268 calls for service throughout the year.

- The department underwent a change in leadership, with Chief Ken Wood retiring and Assistant Chief Jon Campbell being promoted to Fire Chief.
- The Department added a new Fire Inspector position, which plays a critical role in protecting the community.
- The Fire Department started the process of developing a Master Plan, led by Emergency Services Consulting International. The Master Plan, which is expected to be presented to the Commission in the next few months, will inform many of the department's goals moving forward.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Human Resources Department was busy helping recruit employees for critical vacant positions throughout 2021. The HR Department helped explore new recruitment avenues and employ creative retention strategies.
- The HR Department has played an integral role in helping staff navigate the COVID pandemic. HR has helped provide rapid testing for City employees, along with implementing protocols to aid the mitigation of spreading the virus.
- HR focused on employee collaboration, developing an Employee Advisory Group to support and advise the department in matters impacting staff.
- A Workplace Climate Survey was developed and distributed by the HR Department this past year, which garnered a nearly 60% return rate.
- The HR Department played an integral role in negotiating two major labor contracts with the International Association of Firefighters Local #448 and the Helena Police Protective Association.
  - The City is currently in Labor Management Committee discussions with the Helena Police Protective Association regarding two initiatives: development and implementation of a disciplinary policy and officer mental health.

### **2022 Goals**

- The Human Resources Department is focused on moving forward its long-term goal of being the #1 Employer of all cities in the State of Montana by 2026.
  - One important piece of this process is completing an internal salary analysis, which the HR Department is currently going through.

## **MUNICIPAL COURT**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- Municipal Court staff moved to their new offices and courtroom, while continuing to provide Court services during the two-week transition.
- Court documents were moved to an electronic format, making them available online and more easily accessible to the public.
- Jury Summons for Jury Service for term year were sent out in postcard form. Jurors were asked to fill out Jury Service form online, for a more efficient response from public. The court received a great reaction to this change and forms were completed online by public and processed in record time.
- Court clerks cleared 1410 warrants in 2021 and collected and issued restitution in the amount of \$63,000.

### **2022 Goals**

- Municipal Court staff will continue to work on retention and management of court documents.
- The Court is also committed to improving staff efficiency, as well as improving education of defendants on their charges and requirements to achieve compliance and completion of sentencing.

## **PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN LANDS**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

#### ***Open Lands***

- With Community Partners Helena Rotary, the Open Lands staff constructed an accessible trail on Mount Helena to facilitate access for people of varying ability levels to enjoy our cherished Mount Helena City Park.
- Open Lands completed 275 acres of forest fuel reductive thinning within open lands and treated approximately 410 acres of noxious weeds treatment within city open lands.

#### ***Parks***

- The Parks and Recreation staff managed to maintain and keep the City parks open for use despite the water restrictions.
- Improvements were made to the Pedestrian Mall, Kindrick Field and Memorial playground.

- Parks installed an irrigation well to increase access to quality water resources in Waukesha Park and Community Garden.

### ***Recreation***

- The Recreation Department hosted over 22,000 visitors at Last Chance Splash and Pool.
- Recreation staff taught more than 1,000 kids through swimming lessons, tennis lessons, pickle ball lessons and ice-skating classes.
- The City resumed planning and communication efforts to explore a Regional Parks District with the County that could, if ultimately implemented, appreciably improve ability to maintain and provide recreation and sports amenities and services to the greater Helena area and community.

### ***Urban Forestry***

- Urban Forestry staff removed 124 trees, planted 168 new trees, and donated over 40 cords of firewood to the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program.

### ***Civic Center***

- Despite the continued challenges COVID has created for the events industry the Civic Center hosted over 70 different events in 2021, with 135 dates booked at the venue.

### ***Golf Course***

- Bill Roberts Golf Course saw an increase in rounds played to 36,655.
- The Golf Course hosted three weekends of cross-country track events, a disc golf tournament, and hosted many weeks of cross-country skiing in partnership with the Last Chance Nordic Ski Club.

## **POLICE**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Police Department established several civilian positions within the Department, which will help the department continuing developing its community engagement efforts. These positions include a Volunteer Coordinator, Animal Control/Urban Wildlife Program Officer, and a Crash Investigator.

- The Police Department also hosted its first ever Citizen Academy. The Academy started in September of 2021 and ran for 8 weeks. This Citizen Academy allowed the community of Helena to see and learn first-hand what goes on with the Police Department and its operation.
- The department started the process for implementing a new Computer Aided Dispatch/Records Management System, which will take multiple years to complete.
- Chief Steve Hagen retired after 30 years of service to the Helena Community. We thank Chief Hagen for his many years of service to the Department and our community.

## **2022 Goals**

- The Police Department is focused on recruitment and retention of Officers. By the end of 2022, we would like to be closer to full staffing.
- Leadership is working on implementing a mental health program within the Department for our Officers and support staff.
- Community engagement will remain one of the Police department's primary focuses, along with Public Safety. The Department wants to make sure to keep developing positive community partnerships.

## **PUBLIC WORKS**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Public Works Department accomplished several substantial projects, including its support of the Rodney Street Project, as well as completing all the installation of the Water and Sewer Mains on the Westside Project.
- Public Works added 3 miles of water main and 1.85 miles of sewer main to the system.

### ***Water Treatment***

- The water treatment team produced 2.15 billion gallons of water in 2021 this is a record amount. 65% of the water was produced within a 60-day timeframe.

### ***Wastewater Treatment***

- Through optimization, the Wastewater Treatment team achieved the best phosphorus numbers ever for the City of Helena and gained a better understanding of what will need to be done in the future.

- We had five consecutive quarters of no chronic toxicity. Per our permit, we requested a reduction through DEQ and it was granted. We now will test one species alternating which will be a cost and labor savings for the City.

### ***Utility Maintenance***

- The Utility Maintenance team repaired 17 main breaks with a large percentage of the break being in the winter months.
- The Utility Maintenance staff also changed out 417 meters and added 110 new meters.

### ***Solid Waste***

- The Solid Waste Division supplied customer service to 188,072 vehicles at the Transfer Station in calendar year 2021.
- The Solid Waste Division diverted 2,479 tons of recycling in 2021 at the Transfer Station and outlying sites around Helena.
- The City of Helena, in contract with Helena Recycling, diverted 377 tons in the source0-separated curbside collection program in 2021.
- The City of Helena generated 4,791 tons of compost in calendar year 2021.

## **TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS**

### **2021 Accomplishments**

- The Transportation Department was busy in 2021, moving construction projects forward while improving operational systems.
- Six Blocks of Rodney Street (from Broadway to 9th Avenue) were completely reconstructed with new water mains, sewer mains, ADA ramps and sidewalks. The business district on the south 3 blocks were further enhanced with period lighting and tree vaults.
- The Transportation Department partnered with the Railroad Urban Renewal District to fund replacement of 3,600 square feet of sidewalk and 320 feet of curb and gutter in the 6th Ward business district.
- The Transit team started implementing a new interactive trip scheduling platform and customer app that allows a passenger to book a trip, adjust time and provide the customer with the ability to pay the required fare electronically. This platform will launch in early 2022 with the first user group being our established ADA Paratransit Service users.

- The City's Fleet Services division is transitioning to a new purchasing process that will allow the City to acquire items at the best prices possible, which enhances our spending power with our Capital resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

Helena continues to work with many partners, including Lewis & Clark County, the State of Montana, the city of East Helena, YMCA, Helena Food Share, National Forest Service, Helena Housing Authority, Rocky Mountain Development Council, United Way, Helena Regional Airport, and many others. While we continue to work with our partners to improve our growing city, we must recognize the great deal of work that is ahead of us. We must boldly tackle tough issues, such as affordable housing for our vulnerable populations, and public safety, while still reflecting the principles and charitable character of our citizens. Together, with our partners, we will accomplish these goals and more, while still tending to our fiscal responsibilities and in service to those who entrusted these decisions to us.

As the City Charter states, Helena is the proud seat of our state government, and as such, it should strive to be the model for the future of our great state. Ladies and Gentlemen the state of affairs of the City of Helena is strong.

I thank you all and I am looking forward to serving you in the years to come. God Bless this City, State and these United States.