

**CITY OF HELENA**  
**SPECIAL CITY COMMISSION MEETING**  
**June 28, 2004**  
**6:00 P.M. – CIVIC CENTER BALLROOM**

***Time & Place***

A special City Commission meeting was held on Monday, June 28, 2004, at 6:00 p.m., in the Civic Center Ballroom, Helena, Montana.

***Members Present***

Mayor Smith indicated for the record that Commissioners Cartwright, Pouliot and Parriman were present. Commissioner Oitzinger was excused. City Manager Tim Burton, City Attorney David Nielsen and Deputy City Clerk Jacki Pierson were present. Others present were Anne Pichette representing the Youth Advisory Council, Jerry Hutch representing the Helena Citizens Council and Jason Mohr with the Independent Record.

***Pledge of Allegiance***

Mayor Smith asked those persons present to please stand and join him in the pledge of allegiance.

***Introductions  
Opening Comments***

Mayor Smith thanked everyone for attending the meeting and outlined how the hearing will proceed. City Manager Burton will give an overview of the walking mall project; HKM Engineering will give a presentation; the commission will make comments and ask any questions and then the public will have the opportunity to speak. The meeting will end at 9:00 p.m. After the commission has heard all the testimony and had the opportunity to look at the final plans, the item will be put on a city commission agenda for a decision.

***Discussion***

Commissioner Cartwright stated he would appreciate hearing how citizens feel regarding TIF funds and if it is being spent appropriately.

Commissioner Parriman stated he has heard many comments and opinions over the last six months regarding the walking mall issue and is interested in seeing how it turns out.

Mayor Smith thanked the community for their interest and stated the vote would be held on July 12, 2004 at the City Commission Meeting.

City Manager Burton explained how the process started and proceeded. He explained staff needs direction from the commission to start designing this project and how to proceed with the other improvements, such as signage and trickle traffic.

***HKM Engineering***

Darryl James from HKM Engineering gave a PowerPoint presentation of the various options for the walking mall. The presentation included the following items: introduction; history of the walking mall; issues & opportunities; project development; frequently asked questions (FAQ'S); and contact information.

***Public Comments***

Mayor Smith declared the public portion of the hearing opened and called for any persons wishing to address the commission.

**Dax Cetroro, The Rialto**, stated the Rialto Bar has been on the walking mall for 30 plus years and would like it to be there for many more. He explained business has been declining lately because of the lack of exposure and accessibility. And because of these problems the walking mall has seen many businesses relocate or shut down. He stated they have thought about relocating but would hate to leave the

walking mall. He feels traffic would help the businesses be more accessible.

**Neil Hayt, 500 Geddis**, stated all the improvements besides the walking mall sound good. He explained the walking mall is not broke so don't fix it. He asked if traffic on the walking would make Helena a better place to live? He stated no. The walking mall is now free of exhaust fumes and the motion of traffic and changing that is sadly ill advised.

**Beverly Gibson, 708 Touchstone**, stated the proponents of traffic have yet to make a case. She presented the commission with a news article from the June 23, 2004 Queen City Newspaper.

**Randy Pugh, 2408 Gregson Court**, stated all the improvements are good; however, is there a major plan for the walking mall area that sets a picture for 20 years from now? He feels these changes should be incremental, in order to show what works and what doesn't.

**Steve Johnson, 418 Holter**, stated he would like the Great Northern Town Center and the downtown-walking mall to be connected, in order to enhance them as one entity because they are both unique but should also flow freely. He feels the walking mall should stay just how it has been.

**Bill Schneider, 2021 Stuart**, stated he wishes to keep the downtown-walking mall as it is and to keep traffic off of it. He mentioned the traffic situation on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Broadway. He is in support of the other improvements with the exception of the parking garage. He suggested the option of building a European style round about. Mr. Schneider thanked the commission for keeping an open mind because the downtown-walking mall is important to many people in Helena. He stated adding traffic to the walking mall would hurt the businesses and deprive them of having a vibrant retail activity. He stated if traffic is allowed on the walking mall it would cause congestion due to traffic and fuel emissions, which would cause fewer customers. Mr. Schneider urged the commission to look at downtown as a business center instead of a retail center and instead of destroying it, promote it. He believes the citizens have an understanding as to what happens in the walking mall area, as he played a part in helping build it through his patronage. Mr. Schneider stated allowing traffic on the walking mall is the beginning of the end and the approval of traffic is the first step for the removal of the walking mall.

**Michael Downey, 1620 Ohio Avenue**, stated business flight is not only in the downtown area but also throughout town. He explained there are alternatives, such as, signage improvement and marketing. There is not a lack of parking space in the downtown area; however, people are not parking there because of the limited parking times, meters, and "permit parking only" signs. He recommended getting rid of the parking meters and extending the parking times. Helena has plenty of parking; however, it's not friendly. A more vibrant downtown is better than revenue from parking meters. The playground equipment needs replacing, along with many other walking mall areas and by enhancing those; it would bring the people out there. He explained there are a number of steps before traffic can be initiated and asked why it would take 18 months to change the signage for Last Chance Gulch? He stated he is opposed to traffic on the walking mall and would urge the commission to take the slow route because their vote will change the face of downtown.

**Molly Peterson, 1812 Waukesha**, explained she had hopes of living downtown; however, during the winter months snow removal is not that great and stated snow removal is important. She mentioned her

relative's love visiting the walking mall because it is such a pleasant environment. Ms. Peterson recommended changing the store hours to make it more convenient for evening shoppers.

**Margaret Hollow, 428 Washington Drive**, stated she is against traffic on the walking mall. In order to entice people to the walking mall there certainly can't be exhaust fumes. She stated there should be more specialty stores in the area and the playground should be kept simple. She recommended hiring a high school student to patrol that mall.

**Marga Lincoln, 220 Adams**, stated she feels it is foolish to spend money to fix a problem, when it won't fully complete the improvements and explained there is more problems going on in the walking mall than parking. She listed several businesses that have closed and have front street parking. Ms. Lincoln suggested using the TIF money to hire a consultant to revive the downtown, survey community members, encourage outdoor sitting, locate office space at street level, learn from other communities. She stated there needs to be a plan and the citizens need to be behind it.

**Joe Keily, 102 S. Benton Avenue**, stated he watched the walking mall be built during urban renewal and the city has done everything they can to ruin the citizens enjoyment by placing so many strict rules on the mall and by not maintaining the area. He commented on the TIF funds dispersement and the perception that downtown is blighted; however, there are vacancies all over town. This is the result of many factors, such as, web and catalog shopping. Mr. Keily stated he spoke with a retail expert who mentioned that casino's take money away from the retail business but was complementary of Helena's downtown. There needs to be a strategic plan along with a slow-implemented process.

**Patricia Spencer, 1234 Leslie**, stated she was with Downtown Inc. and had seven recommendations, which were passed out to the commission. The recommendations are attached.

**Barb Moy, 800 Joslyn**, reiterated for the commission to review the article in the Queen City News, which was submitted for the record. Ms. Moy stated rental fees are too high for the downtown area and believes that her input should count. She does not want to see traffic in the walking mall but would like to see the mall improved.

**Allen Peura, 1100 Highland Street**, stated he is in favor of keeping the downtown mall as it is. He explained it comes down to the vision, which would be a vibrant retail in downtown and asked if that is a viable vision? He listed other possible visions, such as, mixed residential usages. He recommended not wasting the TIF money and keep walking mall and build on that strength. He asked the commission to challenge the citizens to create a successful vision and make it work.

**Susan Edwards, Clarke Street**, stated she is against traffic and mentioned she is in advertising and has not heard a single ad for any of the businesses in that area. She asked what makes the walking mall and businesses a destination? Ms. Edwards stated the renovations are exciting but there are other solutions instead of adding traffic.

**Denise Pengrath, 732 Breckenridge Street**, stated a sense of place should be one of the goals during the walking mall renovations and she does not support traffic on the walking mall. She expressed her love for Helena and that she does shop downtown. She asked if increased parking would improve the problems in the walking mall area? There should be an analysis of where parking and traffic improves business economic hardships and stated not enough time has been spent on what will and won't work. However, she doesn't think parking is a deterrent.

She stated she has concerns that there is not enough money to finish the project. Ms. Pengrath stated she's for a vital downtown and marketing plan to keeping pedestrian traffic only, capitalize on that and make it a huge success.

**Tom Morrison, 5420 York Road**, stated the walking mall has failed and success can be reached by change. The walking mall charm won't disappear because of traffic and HKM designers are doing a wonderful job.

**Dan Gengler, 403 N. Ewing**, stated the walking mall is a community asset. He mentioned he has lived and worked in the downtown area and recommended better use of the commercial office space. Mr. Gengler stated it is very unlikely that traffic would increase retail in the area and he is opposed to open traffic.

**Joe Goldies, 642 Dearborn**, stated he has lived in many places and like Helena the most. He has a number of visitors every year and they all have remarked on how wonderful the walking mall is. He urged the commission not to change the walking mall.

**Thomas Warsinski, 1401 Phoenix Avenue**, stated he has lived in a lot of places but Helena is his favorite place. He recommended supporting what is already there and to change the signage.

**? 905 N. Ewing**, stated she was born and raised in Anchorage but ended up in Helena and loves it. She explained she is opposed to traffic and bicycles on the walking mall and feels the downtown is the heart of Helena. She listed several problems, signage on the Gulch, parking signage, litter clean up, and mentioned businesses should take some responsibility for the area. She recommended installing maps of business and site seeing locations.

**Lynne Boone, 638 1<sup>st</sup> Street**, stated she is in agreement with many of the proposed ideas and feels a cul-de-sac should be looked at. It would provide easy access to the parking structure and for the tour trains and trolley. Out door eating areas – city ordinances? Visitor center could be added – attractive marquee – better advertising and businesses are closed – indicator of an open signal – advertisers. They do not see the point of having a street. Love the idea of enhancing the walking mall.

**Jerry Hutch, 1111 E. State Street**, stated trickle traffic should not be on the walking mall and explained the tour train being on the walking mall caused the death of John Byrd. He explained traffic barriers on the walking mall would be a hazard to the handicap.

**David Barnes, 1422 Broadway**, with Saunders Jewelry, recommended taking out the permit parking and maintaining the upkeep on the mall. He stated business owners choose to have their businesses on the walking mall and it should remain the same.

Kevin DeTienne, 40 W. North Road, explained the mall hasn't been renovated in 15 years, which is far to long. He recommended keeping certain points of interest during the reconstruction and marketing campaigns would be good for the area.

**Amy Glasscock, S. Benton**, stated she is against traffic on the walking mall and listed the numerous businesses she uses in that area.

**Hal Fossum, 1209 Stuart Street**, stated he has never seen such a passion for the design of one street. Helena wants this to succeed and he disagrees with the fact that retailers won't succeed. The walking mall is the preeminent office location in the city. He believes in time, Helena will see the diversifications with the shops. Mr. Fossum asked if downtown could do better and he answered, yes. Businesses have been taking active steps to upgrade the stores and the

transformation has been remarkable. The BID does not recommend any specific options to the commission; however, more planning is recommended for 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway Avenue areas. People want to invest and the city needs to do its part. Good luck.

**Leo Berry, 2 Quarry Lane**, property owner of 139 Last Chance Gulch, stated he would like to invest more but if the other businesses won't it's not going to work. He recommended the citizens walk the mall and utilize the services down there. Mr. Berry explained status quo is not working and he would like to see a more vibrant downtown regardless of how it is accomplished.

**Allen Nicholson, 1 Quarry Lane**, stated he agrees with how wonderful it is to have the mall – opening up traffic is something that the commission should do. He explained no matter what decision the commission comes to; the citizens need to make it work. He listed several problems in the area and recommended proper maintenance and community support.

**Wendy Duensing, 1904 Floweree**, Parrot Confectionary, stated she is here representing her family business. She stated there were good intentions in the 1970's and the plan was never completed. She further stated her support regarding traffic on the walking mall.

**Dennis McCahon, 1934 Hauser Blvd.**, mentioned the lack of architecture on the walking mall and further explained his opposition to traffic on the walking malls. However, he supported the other improvements.

**Ken Saunders, 7 Limestone Court**, owner of Saunders Jewelry, stated they have been on the walking mall for 17 years and would continue to work hard on their improvements. Mr. Saunders explained he proposed a petition for traffic on the walking mall and received 1300 signatures from people who were against it, which were submitted for the record. He mentioned the commission should look 30 years to the future and not 30 years to the past for their answer.

**Joe Campeau, 5505 York Road**, stated his office is over the Parrot Confectionary, and mentioned he originally helped design and owned part of the GasLight Theater. He further explained his opposition for traffic on the walking mall.

**Amy Kruse, 1241 South Hills Drive**, stated the walking mall holds a special memory for her and it would be irresponsible for the commission to let it go and not give what is already there the effort it deserves by taking care of it. She stated she is opposed to traffic on the walking mall.

**Joyce Saunders, 1501 Mount Helena Dr.**, stated she noticed, especially on weekends, walking mall employees were parked in the closest spots available and that could potentially keep customers from stopping by. She further voiced her opposition for traffic on the walking mall.

**Janice Frisch, 1517 Waukesha**, stated Helena is changing rapidly; however, traffic would not change the walking mall's current situation and recommended working on what is already down there.

**Connie Hutch, 1111 E. State Street**, secretary for the Montana Association for the Blind, stated once they heard the walking mall could potentially have traffic on it; they switched their reservations for the Association because traffic is a hazard for the impaired. She stated she is opposed to traffic on the mall.

**Teresa Hastings, 923 Missoula Avenue**, owners of Taco Del Sol, stated her business has done just fine and she has not received one complaint on why she is in the walking mall. She recommended the city

provide incentives for businesses to come there and to promote the area of Last Chance Gulch.

**Bob Leach, 3043 Canyon Ferry Road**, explained he worked on the walking mall back in the 1970's and stated he has seen many changes. His concern is not what might have been but what is now. Mr. Leach stated there is a need in the walking mall for maintenance, better snow removal. He mentioned the discussion regarding a spotlight on Broadway and how winter weather would cause many accidents considering the slope.

**Madge Allen, 2028 Grizzly Gulch**, stated her view had been softened by the public out cry of opposition for traffic on the mall and recommended working in incremental stages and improving the signage. She listed several possible improvements would be to promote marketing, cleaning the sidewalks and concentrating on better snow removal from the area.

**Eddie Calaher, 21 N. Last Chance Gulch**, stated maintenance needs to be improved on the walking mall and traffic would take away the walking malls unique quality. She stated the area is a tourist destination and that marketing it as one of the few remaining walking malls in the country.

**Michael O'Neil, 621 Hillsdale**, explained the city needs to maintain the walking mall and by changing it, more would be lost.

**Becky Fishe, State Street**, recommended installing maps to show where businesses and specific items of interest are located. She stated she loves the walking mall.

**Kerry Mueller, 7115 Skelly Gulch**, stated she has enjoyed the atmosphere on the walking mall and enjoys bringing her son into that. As a single mother she recommended exploring different activities to attract single mothers to the area. She further stated her opposition to traffic on the walking mall.

There being no further persons wishing to address the commission, the public portion of the hearing was closed.

Discussion

Mayor Smith thanked each and every one of the citizens for their testimony. He stated the decision would be held on July 12, 2004 at the regular city commission meeting.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

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Mayor James E. Smith

ATTEST:

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Clerk of the Commission