

**SUMMARY OF ADMINISTRATIVE MEETING**  
**April 15, 2020 – 4:00 p.m.**  
**Zoom Online Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/4129664351>**

- 1. Call to order, introductions, opening comments** – Mayor Collins called the meeting to order. Commissioners Dean, Haladay, Logan, and O’Loughlin were present.

Staff present: Interim City Manager Melinda Reed; City Attorney Thomas Jodoin; and City Budget Analyst Chris Couey.

Others in attendance: Drenda Niemann, Lewis & Clark County Public Health Officer; and Reese Martin, Lewis & Clark County Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) Coordinator.

- 2. Commission comments, questions** –

Commissioner Dean updated the Commission with a census report, noting that Helena has the highest response rate in the state to date at 57.1%. The Census Bureau is extending the window for sealed data collection and self-response collection to 10/31/2020.

Commissioner Haladay went on a walk audit with the Non-Motorized Transportation Advisory Committee (NMTAC) on Granite Avenue where it turns into Broadwater, going down toward the Montana Wild center. The intersection at Highway 12 and Granite is an especially dangerous location, often used to access Spring Meadow Lake, the Centennial Trail, and Montana Wild. NMTAC was successful in getting MDT to put in a pedestrian-activated rapid flashing beacon on that corner, but once you cross from Granite over to the north side there are no pedestrian facilities – pedestrians must walk in the road or on private property. NMTAC has asked the Commission to consider ordering sidewalks on the southwestern piece of the north side of the road, which is city property. Commissioner Haladay asked if the Commission would consider discussing this at a future Administrative meeting and thinks it is appropriate to discuss separately from other budget discussions, as it is similar to the Days Inn/Albertson’s sidewalk projects previously undertaken. Mayor Collins said he spoke with MDT Director Michael Tooley, who said MDT is going to put in a blinker device this spring. Commissioner O’Loughlin said she would be willing to schedule time to talk about sidewalks for the area if the rest of the Commission agrees. Commissioners Dean and Logan concurred.

- 3. City Manager’s Report** – Interim City Manager Reed reviewed a proposed timeline for preliminary budget presentations. Departments are currently doing their reviews. The next step will be preparation of the preliminary budget for FY2021, to be presented at the

May 4<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting. There will be an opportunity at that meeting for Commission review and public input. In late May there will be notice of a public hearing, and on June 8<sup>th</sup> the Helena Citizens' Council will review the plan. The budget is scheduled to be adopted by resolution on June 22, 2020. Ms. Reed asked for questions and comments on the proposed timeline.

Commissioner O'Loughlin asked for clarification about work sessions to discuss the budget presentations and when they would occur. Interim Manager Reed indicated it would be the second half of May. Commissioner O'Loughlin said she appreciates having these presentations made in shorter blocks of time of 2-3 hours, instead of one all-day session. Ms. Reed said that the larger departments might need 3-4 sessions, then the smaller departments could be grouped together in shorter sessions. Commissioner Dean asked if the timeline would be posted on the Commission website, and if there would be some flexibility in scheduling in case some discussions needed more time. Interim Manager Reed said they plan to build in extra time, and that the timeline will be posted when it's firmed up. Commissioner Haladay stated that he has done both shorter sessions and an all-day process and agrees that shorter sessions are more effective. He also advocated for extra time to be built in for time overruns. Commissioner Logan asked if May 4<sup>th</sup> will be solely an informational presentation or if there will be an opportunity to ask questions. Interim Manager Reed confirmed that it is planned to be mainly informational, but they can take questions.

a. **Discussion regarding allocation of resources for vulnerable homeless populations in Helena in collaboration with Lewis and Clark County**

The Coronavirus Disease ("COVID-19") has occurred across the United States with 16 confirmed cases to date in Lewis and Clark County. COVID-19 has been declared by the World Health Organization as a global pandemic that is controllable via precautionary measures to stop the spread of the disease. At the April 7, 2020 Joint Work Session, there was a discussion on the topic of cost sharing between City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County for shelter needs related to COVID-19. An additional discussion occurred at the April 8, 2020 City Commission meeting during the City Manager's report.

The City of Helena's leadership is working quickly to address the ever-changing situation of COVID-19. The City is coordinating with the County DES and County Public Health Officer to monitor efforts and activities through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The City Manager invites the Commission to discuss the issue of shelter needs during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Interim City Manager Reed introduced County Public Health Officer Drenda Niemann, and County DES Coordinator Reese Martin to discuss allocation of resources for the

vulnerable homeless population, an update on FEMA status, health priorities, and the work of the Community Organization Active in Disasters (COAD).

Ms. Niemann said that the County public health department has been working overtime and they appreciate the partnerships working together across the community. She said that alternative shelters are being discussed due to public health goals she asked the community to address: to ensure as many people as possible are sheltered in non-congregate settings whenever possible; and to identify and operationalize isolation shelters for individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 but don't have a place in which to isolate. She has learned that a kind of patchwork of funds will be needed to cover secondary expenses to shelters. Ms. Niemann said that as the COAD identifies needs, they will need to see what expenses can be covered by their community partners, and those that can't be covered will need to be picked up by public funds from the city and county. The County Commission previously made \$25,000 available if FEMA funding is approved; they have now agreed to make those funds available regardless of FEMA reimbursement. Although they are a week into discussing operationalizing shelters, they haven't been able to move due to uncertainties in funding. Since County funds may now be used to cover expenses not covered at the community level, she recommended that the City follow suit with a similar arrangement. She thanked the Mayor and Commissioners.

Mr. Martin then addressed the Commission. He said that his role here is to advise the Commission on what he has learned recently regarding the non-congregate sheltering information put out by FEMA. FEMA put out guidelines for what they would reimburse. They identified "at-risk individuals" as first responders and healthcare professionals. At-risk individuals within the shelter population include anyone over the age of 65 or who has underlying medical conditions that puts them at higher risk from COVID. They will reimburse expenses for any shelters that are established for COVID-positive individuals but will not reimburse costs for placement of healthy homeless people in non-congregate shelters. He has identified facilities for COVID-positive individuals: the Jan Shaw Building will provide an isolation area for first responders; The Journey Home will house women who test positive; and Fairgrounds will shelter men who test positive. He's also working with the school system to use the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Gym, and a (unnamed) volunteer fire department can take overflow first responders if needed. FEMA will provide funding for security and staffing at these facilities. Mr. Martin submitted cost estimates to the City Manager.

Commissioner Dean said she has concerns about safety at shelters, and about keeping families together. She would like an update on conversations Mr. Reese had with representatives from the Friendship Center, the YWCA, and Florence Crittenton in the

event they have positive cases. She said there was some confusion over what the County would be using hotel rooms for and asked for further information. Mr. Martin said he has had communications with other DES Coordinators across the state who tried to approach hotel owners that might be willing to accept COVID-positive individuals. They're encountering a problem in that many hotel owners are requesting that their facilities be refurbished and remodeled afterward, at no cost to themselves. Due to this situation he has tried to focus on local government-owned buildings. He selected The Journey Home for women because security was already installed there. For the men's shelter, he's looking to ensure that there's someone there to make sure the residents don't leave or become disruptive. As for keeping families together, he prefers to not put healthy family members with those who are sick. He has asked organizations to work with their clients to come up with an alternative care/custody plan if a parent becomes ill. Regarding security, he has reached out to some private security firms without much luck, due to them not wanting their employees to work around COVID-positive people. He is looking into having local law enforcement officers provide shelter security in their off hours. Commissioner Dean asked how many families The Journey Home can service. Mr. Martin explained that there are eight rooms with beds, a living area, and kitchen facilities. The 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Gym is planned for overflow for women if needed. He said the health department will have to determine if children will be placed with sick parents.

Commissioner Haladay asked how the County would use the \$25,000 it allocated, and how far it will go. Mr. Martin said the Rocky Mountain Development Corporation (RMDC) gave them \$30,000 to pay for hotel rooms, but it's not enough to cover wrap-around costs. Their goal is to cover wrap-around and staffing costs with the \$25,000. The County is willing to forego FEMA reimbursement for this.

Commissioner Dean asked about the timeline for moving overflow individuals from God's Love into another facility and what the process would entail. Mr. Martin said that RMDC has already talked to the La Quinta Inn, and once a deal is made the COAD has asked for 24 hours to get things set up before moving people in. Mayor Collins asked who is responsible for paying for damage to the rooms. Mr. Martin said it will be either RMDC or the individual causing the damage. Ms. Niemann said that the COAD people work with these agencies often and know what needs to be done. They can provide more information. Commissioner Dean congratulated the COAD for their efforts and noted that the most basic function of city government is to protect citizens; the Commission needs to step up and do this regardless of FEMA reimbursement. Mayor Collins pointed out that questions still need to be asked.

Commissioner Logan said they received an update from Interim Manager Reed that the State received approval from FEMA for a state-wide non-congregate shelter plan, which

means that counties don't have to go to FEMA for approval, just to the State. They also received a table outlining various plans for sheltering; he asked if those plans had been approved by the State and if the County is ready to move forward on those. Mr. Martin said the State has not yet given approval. Commissioner Haladay asked if they were moving forward with using RMDC, as well as city or county funds to put non-positive testing people in La Quinta at this point? Mr. Martin said plans are still in the works, but they may be able to start moving people by next week. Commissioner Haladay asked what the minimum number of days were planned for housing people at La Quinta, noting that the numbers they were given by Mr. Martin used 30-day blocks. Mr. Martin said they don't have an estimate on the number of days needed, and that the 30-day blocks were used due to FEMA reporting requirements. Commissioner Haladay asked for a further breakdown of hotel housing and wrap-around costs. Mr. Martin said that the COAD is working on more detailed plans and budget numbers, and their plans will depend on what the City Commission decides at this meeting, if FEMA changes their policies etc.

Commissioner Haladay asked for more information about providing security at the shelters and if the Helena Police Department can provide staffing. He asked about costs and availability. Mr. Martin said he only asked Chief of Police Hagen for the rate they charge for extra duty but nothing further. He doesn't know if the State will allow officers from other jurisdictions to fill in here but will find out. He will update the Commission when he has more information.

Commissioner Haladay returned to the use of the \$25,000 allotted by the City, saying that he's certain costs will be more than that, up to \$100,000. He said that if the City is going to start this project and offer housing, they can't quit in the middle of the emergency because the money has run out. They must come up with continuing funds until the need is gone. He asked what the capacity of internal funding for that amount, assuming the City won't get a 75% return from FEMA for that expenditure. Ms. Niemann said they will investigate. She noted that City Budget Analyst Chris Couey was in attendance and could give them more information.

Mr. Couey said he did some analysis of the city general fund, which is where the money will probably be drawn from. There are some unknowns, such as second half tax payments, that are uncertain. As of now, the general fund is running a \$100,000 deficit for the year; between anticipated lower revenues and projected actual expenditures for the rest of this year, it looks like the City will have a positive cash flow of about \$375,000 if they stay within the current budget authority. Mayor Collins asked if that was a solid figure – Mr. Couey confirmed it is.

Commissioner O'Loughlin asked Ms. Niemann and Mr. Martin if the Friendship Center, YWCA, or Florence Crittenton have seen the updated plan that was just submitted to FEMA. Mr. Martin said they had not. Ms. Niemann said the County has a good understanding of what those organizations need, primarily shelters that are up and ready to be used quickly if needed. Commissioner Dean said that she was on a shelter working group with representatives from United Way and Good Samaritan. They are concerned that people might be shifted around among shelters after the emergency is past. They want to keep working to ensure permanent housing for those people.

4. **Litigation Strategy-** City Attorney Jodoin had nothing to report.
5. **Department Requests-** None.
6. **Department Presentations-** None.
7. **Public Comment-** None.
8. **Committee discussion and direction to the City Manager-** Commissioner Dean asked if there is a consensus for Interim Manager Reed to move ahead in helping provide resources using non-FEMA reimbursed funds. Commissioner O'Loughlin noted that the figure of \$25,000 was thrown out by a County Commissioner without any detailed discussion or plans, and the City wasn't asked to weigh in on the figure. She said that the City should be a partner in this project, but so far they haven't had an active role in the planning process. They need to consider what they, and their staff, need to keep informed about the plans moving forward and that should be factored into the direction given to the City Manager. Commissioner Logan said he supports cost sharing relating to helping the City's vulnerable populations during this emergency and he is in favor of giving the Manager latitude to move funds to support these efforts. Commissioner Dean agreed. Commissioner Haladay said he is in favor of mimicking the County's actions, but if the City is going to be a partner they need to be more cognizant of what they're being asked to fund. He said it's difficult to have discussions about funding in the abstract and urged the Commission to put a cap on expenditures until they get more information and clarity. Mayor Collins noted that time is of the essence, and that he is in favor of allowing the City Manager to move forward for now using the \$25,000 they agreed on last week. Commissioner O'Loughlin suggested that they lift the restriction that the first \$25,000 must be used for FEMA-approved projects, but that any expenditures over that will have to be discussed jointly with the County. The rest of the Commission agreed. Interim City Manager Reed was instructed to move forward, at her discretion, using the \$25,000 allotted so far and to keep the Commission informed.

**9. Adjournment-** The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 p.m.