



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
August 11, 2020**



GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes
- VACANT

CITY OF HELENA STAFF

- Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager
- Kristi Ponzoso, Director, P & R, Open Lands
- Jennifer Schade, Recorder

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD

- Ross Johnson *excused*

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

- Nick Sovner

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Nate Kopp

Via Zoom Meeting

TIME: 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/96003068221?pwd=WEEd5MWplUVZLNHpqKy9NektINjZ2dz09>

Meeting ID: 960 0306 8221

Passcode: 879078

One tap mobile

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Meeting ID: 960 0306 8221

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/u/ad3r1NolwZ>

Call to Order

- Chairman, Eric Sivers called the August 11, 2020 HOLMAC meeting to order at 5:38 pm. A quorum was not established.
- Brad received a note from Ross that he would not be in attendance.

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors Joan Miles

Note: Meetings are being recorded.

Minutes Approval

- March 2020 Minutes (Jennifer will need to submit)

HOLMAC Action Items

- None.

New Business

Update on open lands management

- Brad distributed where we are at with the work plan. He highlighted our accomplishments. We are having a very good year considering everything that has happened this year.
- Brad and Nate met earlier in the week to discuss Prickly Pear's (PPLT's) accomplishments to date within the trails corridor and what was included in their contract. They have been doing very well. Because of COVID, some of the public engagement items did not occur.
- One thing that PPLT did accomplish within the last couple of weeks was some trail realignment at the Beattie Street Trailhead. Brad then commended PPLT in getting the trail lined up with the new trailhead parking area. It is beautiful.
- The other items were things that were discussed and work that needed to be completed within the system.
- One big public interest item as of late has been our weed management program. We had another big weed crop within our open lands system. We are completing our contract with Helena Weed Control, and we completed double the amount of acreage that we sprayed. We went from 200 – 400 acreage (equivalent to approximately 1/5 of our open land system). Other items we have worked on include spot spraying (based on customer complaints) with back-pack sprayers, and keeping our trailheads and inner-city open lands pieces mowed and trimmed.
- Brian stated he was walking by the golf course and there was some heavy equipment on the hill. He asked what they were working on at that location. Brad stated that on the other side of that fence is private property and there is a fuel mitigation project going on.
- Nate stated that PPLT has signed a purchase-sale agreement with an adjacent landowner to Helena Open Lands just on the west side of Mount Helena. If looking at a map, it is the "puzzle-piece" zone between the Mount Helena Open Lands adjacent to the Andes Trail and the DNRC property just to the west of it. It is approximately 50 acres. The hope is to acquire the land and be able to transfer it to the city as a donation (similar to what was done with the Whyte and LeGrande properties). There is no closing date as of yet.

- Brad added that we are close to finishing the forestry work on the LeGrande property. We have also completed approximately 80% of the first weed treatment on that property.
- Beattie Street Trailhead: Brad stated we are scheduled for crews to chip seal on Monday. Following that process, the striping of the parking lot will occur. At that point we will then be ready to open the parking area. We will also be putting in the kiosk next week. Thursday we will be drilling holes for the trailhead identification sign and kiosk. We will put a railing on the trail where it leads onto the trailhead to protect the bank that has been grass seeded and to keep visitors channeled on the trail. We are also going to add decomposed granite on the south side of the restrooms. There has been some traffic, but wanted to get the chip-sealing done before we officially open.

Review public process and potential procedure for fall public involvement for major projects

- Kristi – HOLMAC has not met since adopting the new Chapter 7, Recreation Plan which includes the newly adopted public process. Kristi did want to discuss this process and what it might look like in this COVID environment (with potentially doing all meetings remotely). It does present a logistical challenge which was not an issue when discussing the public process.
- Brad – the public process is spelled out systematically in the Open Lands update. One of the parts of the process come September is that city staff will be required to present projects on open lands. We in the parks department are aware of items that need to be accomplished and that they will need to go through this public process but also open it up to suggestions from the public on additional projects that they would like to see on this years' list. Those projects would be in HOLMAC's purview to analyze and to determine what would need to go forth in the second stage. In light of everything that is ongoing, will attempt to present to HOLMAC those projects we feel need to be accomplished in an effort to make the open lands system run more efficiently.
- Kristi – we are planning on doing this in September as outlined in the process, so we are putting together those projects now. Brad – these will go before HOLMAC and then we will have an opportunity at that point for additional projects to be presented by interested public. We will notify the public at the beginning of September that the listening session will be mid-September. We will hold this session one of two ways: via Zoom or find a large enough venue to hold an event. Both Kristi and Brad believe that session will most likely be in a Zoom setting. It is difficult to run a meeting like this using both Zoom and in person. Kristi recommends doing the listening session via Zoom.
- Brian stated that with COVID issues, he feels Zoom is the better option. Karen stated she doesn't have a preference as long as we can get the word out to the public. Eric agreed with Karen. With that said, Eric added that he is very concerned about a meeting indoors and stated the Zoom option is the much safer option.
- Brad stated we will use the open lands contact list to get the word out to the public about the upcoming listening session. This would include the Zoom invitation. Kristi added that we will need to do a news release and the other recommended announcements as well per the directive in the Chapter 7 update. Kristi stated she has done other public meetings via Zoom and we have had good participation. The Commission does their meeting via Zoom. People seem to be getting used to Zoom meetings. It is a pretty user-friendly platform of meeting.

- Brad then mentioned that we will need to figure out how we will be able to share screens in case someone from the public has a document/map, etc. they want to share with the group. There will be due diligence on our part to be ready for that process. Eric suggested we recommend to the public to provide that type of information in advance so the city representative leading the meeting will have the information available for public viewing. The list the city provides (of projects) will be a smaller list than usual.
- Once we get through the first step, we will move on to step two which will require additional HOLMAC coordination after HOLMAC has had time to analyze proposed projects. Brad encouraged board members to review the public process. We anticipate a busy fall season as each month has its assignments.
- Brad will work on getting public notices out for the listening session in September.

Discuss HOLMAC's review of the potential major project list

- Brad is currently working on the major project list, but is asking HOLMAC members to begin thinking of how they will review the projects that will be presented in September. This may involve HOLMAC having a field trip before September to evaluate some of the projects and what they may look like.
- Prior to COVID, Brad had hoped HOLMAC would have monthly field trips in some of the potential project areas. Because of this, Brad foresees a potential field trip after the September meeting.
- Eric asked if Brian or Karen want to review some of the potential project areas. Karen stated she will look at the material provided. She stated we might want to split up the areas (Brad - potentially less than a half of a dozen). Brad added that at this point, we have no idea what we will hear at the listening session.
- Brad stated that some of the project areas are areas that HOLMAC has seen in the past – dating back to 2018. Once HOLMAC has had some time to review the list, we can schedule some time to evaluate the areas that are bringing up the most questions.
- Eric – as the information is provided, HOLMAC members can begin discussions via email and determine which project areas they would like to see.

E-bike policy process

- Kristi has put together a memo requesting that HOLMAC assist with the very beginning stages of some sort of e-bike policy. In Chapter 7 of the Recreation Plan, we identified that an e-bike policy is something that needs to happen. Kristi sees this as a rather long process, but she is asking HOLMAC to assist with the beginning of the process. She is requesting that HOLMAC provides us with background, what other places are doing in the regional context, potentially what other municipalities are doing and potentially provide us some alternatives. Eventually, we will bring this information through a public process and ultimately take this item to the Commission for a recommendation. She wanted to get this issue on HOLMAC's radar. She recommended that perhaps HOLMAC can create a sub-committee to evaluate this process.
- Brian asked if we are seeing greater use of e-bikes. Eric stated he has seen more this year than in the past, but the trails seem busier as well. Kristi has seen more this year. BLM (Bureau of Land Management) recently put out their Scratch Gravels Resource Area Management Plan which includes e-bike trails as well. In our recreation chapter goals, it is recommended that we look at other land management agencies and what they are doing with e-bikes and have a "consistent" or "complimentary" e-bike policy on our open lands.

- Brian then asked if the city has received complaints on e-bike use on trails. Brad stated that we have had a few complaints. Typically, callers want to know what the city's policy is in regards to e-bike use and this is why this issue needs to be addressed.

Future meetings/field trips

- Brad – our next HOLMAC meeting is September 8th. He recommends we hold the listening session on this date in lieu of the HOLMAC meeting.
- All agreed.

Meeting notes and potential facilitation of major projects public process

- Brad and Kristi discussed the possibility of hiring a facilitator for the public process mid-September. They will continue to have these discussions.
- This facilitator would be in charge of running the public listening session meeting.
- Karen stated if the funds are available, she would be in favor of bringing in a facilitator for these public meetings. Eric agreed with this and added this would provide a lot of advantages.
- Brad and Kristi will continue this discussion.

Reports from Subcommittees

PPLT Update – Nate:

- Nate – we have had a good trail season in light of COVID. We have had to limit size of groups working on a project at any given time. We are now able to phase in some small work groups.
- PPLT has presented some plans to the city regarding trail etiquette as well as some youth engagement opportunities and outreach to get youth out on Helena open lands.

Weeds

- We have a seasonal employee out on the trails mapping the current weed patches within the two large parks (Mt. Helena and Mt. Ascension). We will use his data to devise our strategy for next year. There are a number of other areas that need attention as well.
- Brad has had several citizens recommend more public involvement (volunteerism) in weed management. Brad is working on ways we can accomplish this as well.

Forestry

- We are approximately 5 acres short of having the LeGrande's last year's addition work completed. We have also completed several maintenance projects within areas that were done about a decade ago. Some members of the public have come forward to see about other areas they would like worked on.
- We will also begin a project adjacent to the McKelvey Trail on forest service as part of our partnership. This will be forestry and fuels work in the McKelvey Trail corridor. The only trail this will affect is the south, connector trail. The social trail on the ridge that some people are using will be impacted as well.

Public Comment

- Joan Miles
 - ✚ Kristi – is the city going to fill the vacancy on HOLMAC and how can people find out about that? We do have a vacancy and the Mayor's office handles that process. Brad will inquire about where we are at in that process.

- ✚ Brad – how can we get on an open lands contact list? Kristi stated we currently have a stakeholder’s list that includes approximately 400 people. There are other ways we will be reaching out per the public process we have in place. We are required to do news releases, we will post on social media as well as website announcements.
- ✚ Will the public have access to the document mentioned today prior to the September meeting? Brad stated we haven’t put the document out yet. Per the public process, staff will present that at the September meeting. Kristi added that we will have that document available when we send out the agenda.
- ✚ Joan appreciates that the city is going to look at an e-bike policy.
- ✚ Joan then expressed some concerns she has at Davis Street (formally known as the Wood Chip Trail). It has gone beyond heavy use to resource damage. Please consider this when looking at maintenance plans. Kristi encouraged Joan to bring this concern up at the first listening session. Joan added she has also seen more e-bikes coming up Arrowroot.
- ✚ Joan has been using the trails a lot this summer. She has had issues with excessive speed on both Eddy McClure west and east.

Next Meeting Date: September 08, 2020 – September 15, 2020

Future Agenda Items:

Adjournment:

With no further business, HOLMAC adjourned at 700 pm.

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