



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
April 9, 2019**



City of Helena

GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Jeff Shirley
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes

CITY OF HELENA STAFF REPRESENTATIVES:

- Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager
- Greta Dige, Code Enforcement
- Craig Marr, Interim Parks & Rec Director

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD REPRESENTATIVE:

- Ross Johnson

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:

- Denise Roth Barber

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS:

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Evan Kulesa

LOCATION: City-County Building, Room 326

TIME: 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Call to Order

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors

Claudia Clifford, Nick Sovner, DD Dowden, Ann, Lisa Bay, Eric, Lindsay Gilstrap, Thomas Plank, Matt and Eva Culpo, Cathie Erickson, Tony

Minutes Approval – March 12, 2019

- There was confusion on the statement on page 2, bullet #4 where it states “Karen can only serve as backup”. Denise recommended we strike that comment.
- With the noted correction, Brian moved to approve the March 12 minutes with said correction. Eric seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

New Business

Update on RFP

- Brad - we received a second request for proposal. Both organizations that submitted a proposal will participate in an interview process and the selection will be made by the interview panel as to which company will facilitate the update to the plan. The interview process will take place on April 15.
- Brad believes we can still be on track with the beginning of the process in May.

2019 Helena Open Lands Work Plan - Review all Comment Forms received

Provide recommendation regarding changes and/or additions to the Draft 2019 Helena Open Lands Work Plan

- Brad began the discussion about the comments received for the “Draft” 2019 Open Lands Work Plan. The item most commented on item was the bike jumps at the bottom of Davis Gulch. Based on the comments, it is Brad’s recommendation that we move this item into the update process. It can be analyzed as portion of the DeFord Trail or when HOLTAC decides to evaluate this issue. Brad believes a more formal course needs to replace the informal jumps. How we get there will be based on the input during the update process.
- We also received a comment regarding the mitigation options for the directional trail. Brad stated he, Craig Marr, and the Mayor met with Helena Hikes representatives and what they agreed on is that we would like to see participation from the HOLTAC group on discussion those mitigation majors. The consultant can lead us through this process or we can conduct a field trip in May where we all get together to discuss mitigation majors and the completion of the directional trail and its trail connections for sessional and potential mitigation for hikers. This is Brad’s recommendation and that was what was agreed on.
- There was a comment regarding a trail maintenance project to address extreme rutting leading to and from the meadows in the Wakina Sky area. This is not city property (it is US Forest Service ownership) and so we won’t be covering that issue with this work plan.
- Brad stated there were also a couple comments about location trail counters that we have removed. This is no longer a part of the contract so it is no longer an issue. There will be no trail counters funded under a trail maintenance contract this year.
 - Evan reiterated that there was a strategy with moving the trail counters every two years so we could develop trends. Unfortunately we did have some counters stolen. This was the best way to get accurate data about trail use. Evan stated it is important to have good data regarding our trail system. We should strive for it. Brad then stated we will not do any counts within the open lands system this year.
- There was a question regarding the city’s participation in the improvement of the Park City trailhead. We entered into an agreement with the US Forest Service in 2017. Within that agreement, the city applied for and received a RAC (Missouri River **R**esource **A**dvisory **C**ommittee) grant. Under the RAC grant, the city was to facilitate the installation of a restroom and gravel the parking lot. The restrooms have been purchased and the parking lot has been graveled. The Forest Service did the rework of the parking area itself. The balance of the work will occur as the restrooms are installed. We are looking at possibly doing a concrete pad. The reason this was not listed in this work plan is because it is forest service property and therefore forest service decisions on that property. One thought in an effort to facilitate ADA access is to pour a concrete pad for the restroom and we are looking at possibly getting some of the Ales for Trails charity donations to help fund the concrete pad, benches, trash cans – a number of items which were not funded by the RAC grant.
- Brad referred back to the Davis Trail jumps issue as another person arrived at the meeting. He stated that the city has been looking at grant opportunities to build a more formal course. Late arrival Matt Culpo stated that the jumps have been there for years and it would be tough to see them removed. It seems like a waste of money to take them out. Brad added that this will be a project that the HOLTAC group can work through. The thought was to fence the trail and make a more formal course. Denise invited Matt and Eva to participate in the process when that trail is discussed. The meetings with the consultant have not been set. Brad encouraged everyone to watch the agendas. Craig added that all of the meetings will be highly publicized.

- Matt's concern is that the jumps will be removed this summer without being replaced. Brad assured the group that the jumps will remain in place this summer and until the group makes a formal decision on what needs to be done.
- Brad – one of the other comments mentioned was the proposed ADA trail from the Mt. Helena trailhead parking lot to Daisy Hill brought forth by the Helena Rotary Club. The person who commented asked for an update on this. This proposal will have to go through the HOLTAC process and is not a part of the work plan. This work plan is absent of any items included in the HOLTAC process. Items in the work plan are related to other things in the open space system, not trail development.
- There was a question on the public process as it relates to the work plan. This year we continued with the same process as we always have – Greta made sure the information was published on the city's website and social media and we placed two public notices (box ads) in the Helena Independent Record. We made every attempt to get the word out to the public. Brad reminded the group that the work plan are "field" type items, not policies. Craig added that the city is committed to creating new public processes. Eventually we hope to have a process in place for all city entities when dealing with public engagement.
- Brad reminded everyone that HOLTAC and the Recreation update is a completely separate process from this work plan. The work plan includes field projects that we will work on within the open lands system.
- There were several comments regarding the placement of water-bars on some of the trails that are actually roads. These are roads that were built when the Timberline Heights Addition went in. For quite a length of time, there has been issues since they put no water drainage in. The water runs down these roads and down Rowley. It is now fairly rutted and gullied. One question asked was should this go through the environmental analysis (EA) process and should we start analyzing items at that level? We can look at doing this through EA. The reason we looked at doing this mechanically is that one of the easiest ways to install a water-bar in a road is to simply bring material in with a dump truck and create a stock pile and then create your water-bar out of that material instead of excavating material from the road itself. Again, we can work through this process with an EA.
- Brad was asked what the process for an EA would look like. Brad stated you look at the environmental effects of the action. We can give this board a copy of what Craig has presented. It is a similar process to what the state uses. Craig stated it looks at items such as fish, wildlife, environmental effects, etc. we have not been doing this up to this point but it has been proposed. Brad added that for a water-bar of that width, mechanical worked better. That road has needed some type of water control for a number of years. ~~Denise said this is a legitimate question as this will involve some type of public process.~~ The city will need to decide what is the project threshold in doing an EA.
- Is there an EA document available for review? Craig stated that when he worked with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, they had an EA checklist process to include a 30-day public comment period as well as a 30-day review period and sending legal notices that lined out the public process. Craig modified that to fit what we do in open lands. Craig will send out the one he was working on.
- Brad stated we also had a question on the Van Hook Wetlands project. The city has been working with the Wetland Conservation Committee on the Van Hook project. They have been raising funds and have purchased interpretive signs that will be installed. There has been some discussion on the viewing platform. What we agreed to in the work plan was to install an access trail made of decomposed granite surface that proceeds south from Silsbee Avenue for an approximate distance

of 200 feet to a viewing platform that will be supported by a treated wood retaining wall. We will mount the informational signs on the viewing platform. This is most cost-prohibitive.

- Cathie mentioned the city should consider using a heavy-duty paint with particles in it so it is non-slip surface. She stated she knows someone who treated a deck with this material and it has lasted 15 years. She would like this considered. Brad would still like to go forward with the retaining wall as we have the materials and will be able to eventually build a platform that would come off that retaining wall. Brad said he will add this information as optional and we can look at the funding to see where we are. Cathie added that what they measured out was closer to 60 – 80 feet. This may cut the cost of the gravel and installation. Brad added that the signage is beautiful and appreciates all the efforts of the Wetland Conservation Group in making this happen. Cathie asked if the handicapped parking spot is still included in the plan. Brad will need to work with streets to see if we can tier this properly. It is still in discussions.
- There was a comment regarding the trail rider. Brad stated that this item will fall under policy decisions. There was also concern about the city issuing special use permits for organized entities. We do issue special use permits – these are not put out for public review. In doing this, it would make it difficult for us to run our parks operations. At this time, the trail rider makes one stop a week on open lands. These are not the type of decisions we will make on an open space work plan.
- DD stated that she has ridden the trail rider several times and it is predominately popular with mountain bikers which makes it somewhat difficult for the hikers to get on. Has there been discussion of the possibility of offering different times for hikers to use the trail rider vs. the biker community? Brad stated that the trail rider is managed and maintained by Helena Tourism Alliance. That would be discussions to have with them. Andrea stated she will look into this option.
- Brad stated there were questions regarding the installation of a fence west of the Beattie Trailhead. We have trespass issues on private property occurring in that location. It is time to establish a hard boundary that identifies exactly where parks property begins and ends. Brad will add this verbiage into the plan. We are also doing some work on the private property, installing a jackleg fence to help identify where people should and shouldn't go. This should stop the inadvertent trespassing.
- We had a question regarding the Folf Course items that were included in the work plan. The Folf Course will not be covered under the Recreation Plan portion of the update. The recreation update will be more focused on trail activity. The addition of two holes on the Folf Course is an item we will put out publically as part of the work plan. The question that was asked was should this be put on hold until we go through the Recreation Plan update. Again, this item will not be part of the Recreation Plan process.
- One last item was regarding the highmarking (trail blazing) on the DeFord Trail. This is something HOLMAC and the Parks Department looked at a number of years ago. Brad asked the HOLMAC members their opinion on how this issue should be dealt with. When we looked at this before, we were reluctant to put any items there as we were concerned about safety. Brad explained that when you are coming down DeFord below the Archery Range entrance, occasionally some bike traffic will get on the side of the bank a little. Eric stated he would like to see the bottom of that gulch turned into an established system trail that we have been discussing and pull all of that use off of the DeFord Trail. In discussion before, that was HOLMAC's reasoning for developing a designated bike trail.
- Evan then stated if this is something we decide to do, it should be dirt-disturbing and not rocks because users will see that they are still there and now there is an obstacle – that is an issue for Evan. When riding down DeFord, it is easy to get on the side of the bank a little and this may not be ideal. It would be coupled with a better experience in lower Davis, but until that happens, this

should be something to consider. Lisa asked if we could place anchored logs in this area (or brush) or something that would deter that activity. This year it got more acute. This is also happening on the Waterline Trail. Craig then stated that whatever is used, if it is moveable, it will get moved. Karen asked if the highmarking is more of a safety issue or is it more environmental. Claudia stated it is a natural resource, erosion causing issue. Brian stated we should address this similar to any other social use. This is an expansion of the trail system so it might be a similar mechanism used to shut down other man-made trails. Signage is an effective deterrent. Brad stated we could try the carsonite signs, but it is the situation of where they are located that makes this a little more difficult with. Brian stated he believes there are 5 or 6 highmarking spots on the DeFord Trail. Do we address these issues or are there higher priority issues of greater concern that need more attention? Denise asked if a new bike course would be in place in the spring of 2020? Brad stated we will have to find funding for a project such as this. Denise feels that once this is built, the more adventurous riders will opt to ride down into that course. Lisa – the issue is that both situations exist right now. The bike course is down on the gulch and there is still damage being done to the trails. We need to figure out a way to discourage this. Evan stated that the one thing we have learned over the years is that changing human behavior is difficult. On the proactive side, Evan stated that PPLT has a trail etiquette campaign that will begin on social media next week. One of the messages is the importance of staying on existing trails. You can visit Facebook or go to: <https://pricklypearlt.org/trail-tips/>. Education will be key.

- Brad stated that we also had a question regarding the tree stumps along the Ambrose Trail. This was going to be manual excavation, not mechanical. When we moved the trail up due to trespass issues, the original Ambrose trail went through a thinned area (thinning meaning forestry area) and there are stumps that are right along the trail. As part of PPLT's work on that, they will be hand-digging out some of those stumps.
- We also had a request for a Disc Golf Course (Folf) on the west side of Helena. This is not the first time we have seen this request. We do not have a location to facilitate this request. In order to create this course, you have to have a parking plan in place and have terrain that is conducive to that. We just don't have the location so this will not be included in this work plan.
- Brad was asked who someone would need to talk to in order to address the issue in the Wakina Sky area. Evan stated they can contact him at PPLT. PPLT has an agreement with the Forest Service that dictates what PPLT can do (to include maintenance tasks, etc.). If the item is bigger than what PPLT has already been approved to work on (such as a reroute of a trail or a new trail), then you have to go through and EA and ask for permission. Erosion concerns can be addressed by PPLT. Evan did not create a formal plan this year; however, community members can email Evan and he will look into the concerns. If it is an easy fix, PPLT can do the work. If it looks to be more labor intensive, PPLT will look at hiring a contractor. For more information, you can contact Evan via email at: evan@pricklypearlt.org.
- Brad – the only forest service trail that the city controls is McKelvey Trail. This is unique as you start on city property, then on forest property, then on city, etc. We have an agreement in place with the forest service on this property. We now also have an agreement on the Park City Trail. The agreement for the Park City Trail is that the city will facilitate the improvement and we will participate in maintaining it (much like a tag-team approach). The formal agreement is to install the restroom and gravel the parking area.
- Lisa reminded everyone to remember that every time we do an improvement to a trailhead, there is a cost associated with that improvement (i.e., maintenance costs, capital improvements, etc.).

Someone will pay for this over time. We need to think about this going forward as we discuss improvements to the trail system.

- Brad stated that over the years, we have gotten a tremendous amount of assistance from the forest service on our forest fuel burning program. Any time we can help them manage something in the south hills, we are going to do that.
- Claudia noticed that the draft plan has nothing in it regarding the directional trails. All items associated with the directional trails will have to go through the Recreation Plan update process. We are in a situation where we can't do this work; therefore, it wasn't included in this work plan. Brad added that the signage and seeding are complete. There are still some items left to do on the trail as it weathered out last fall as far as some of the wood features. The wood is ready – it just hasn't been put on the trail yet. Those are items in the previous work plan. This is what the commission agreed upon – the completion of that trail, and that is what will be done. Any other items on Mt. Ascension will go through the Recreation Plan Update process.
- Denise added that this year is unique in that by design and direction the city isn't doing any trail work other than maintenance. So this particular work plan is non-trail work. All of the trails will be discussed during this spring and the summer. Brad said that if the update is completed and approved before the end of this season, we can always amend the work plan at that time.
- Tony – to clarify, will further work plans include the recommendations from HOLTAC or will they be maintained as two separate tracks? Brad - items that are agreed upon will most likely still be included in the work plan as a courtesy so the community knows what we doing; however, it will be worded to indicate that this was approved through the update process.
- Denise stated in future work plans it might be helpful to somehow note which items have been formally approved and which items are still up for public comment. Brad agreed with this.
- A community member commented the staff on publicizing this meeting and doing so in a variety of ways. She felt the staff was very responsive in getting this information out to the public.
- There was a rumor that the city is longer providing mutt mitts. Brad stated that is not true – we are still providing that service. Craig added that people should know that the city spends around \$18,000 a year on mutt mitts so we are always looking at cost savings. Brad stated there are less expensive options that we have reviewed; however, we will need to change out our current dispensers.
- To recap: The Lower Davis is going to HOLTAC; the drainage ditch will be put on hold. Brad said we may do a “mini” EA on this. Per Craig – we are looking for suggestions regarding the highmarking on DeFord. Brad is hesitant to do the carsonite. If anyone has any ideas on how to mitigate this, please let Brad know. Evan will reach out to some of the youth biker groups to see if they will take charge on this issue.
- Nick then asked about the Property Acquisition/Exchange section of the plan. What is the process when the city begins looking at different pieces of property. Are there more specific pieces of land that the city will be looking at this year? Brad stated that at this time, we don't have cash for acquisition. We have been opportunistic with the help of PPLT in working on grants, but that is when an opportunity presents itself. When this opportunity does present itself, it comes to HOLMAC and if approved, will then go before the commission.
- **As a reminder, we need to get the memorial plaque for Jim Phillips ordered and placed at the Aftershock Bridge. Jeff will check with Jim's wife about getting a photo to include on the plaque. Brad also suggested reaching out to Fred Stanaway (he was Jim's “Smokejumper” friend).**
- Brad will make the changes discussed (wording on Van Hook, the fence at Beattie, installation of water-bars on hold and remove the removal of the bike jumps from the plan).

- Denise in regards to the process – different segments will be discussed at different times. Will the city commission in turn review the updated plan in its entirety or each trail. Brad stated it will be the entire document after the public comment period and will then go to the commission for adoption. The timeframe for this process will be the decision of the consultant. They will schedule their meetings based on the subject matter.
- Brad stated the consultant will focus on goals and objectives. Chapter 7 will include policy items.

Reports from Subcommittees

Weeds – Greta

- Now that the snow is melting, the weeds are growing. We will be working on getting volunteer groups in place for weed pulling, etc.
- The bugs will be placed mid to the end of May. They are our most successful biocontrol method.

Report from PPLT

- Evan – trailhead etiquette will be coming out soon. It provides basic rules for trail use. The tourism alliance is helping us with funding. This will also be shared on social media. Evan will outreach to local trailhead groups.

Public Comment

Next Meeting Date: May 14, 2019

Future Agenda Items

Adjournment

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

ADA NOTICE

The City of Helena is committed to providing access to persons with disabilities for its meetings, in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Montana Human Rights Act. The City will not exclude persons with disabilities from participation at its meetings or otherwise deny them the City's services, programs, or activities.

Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations to participate in the city's meetings, services, programs, or activities should contact Sharon Haugen, Community Development Director, as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to arrange for the requested accommodation, at any of the following: Phone: (406) 447- 8490; TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711 Email: citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov, Mailing address & physical location: 316 North Park, Avenue, Room 445, Helena, MT 59623.