



City of Helena

HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE SUMMARY December 12, 2019



GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes
- Mark O'Keefe

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

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

- Nick Sovner

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Nate Kopp

LOCATION: City-County Building, Room 326

TIME: 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Call to Order

- The HOLMAC meeting was called to order at 5:36 pm.

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors: Barry Hood, Claudia Clifford

Minutes Approval

- With no noted corrections, Karen moved to approve the minutes as presented. Nick seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

- None.

New Business

2020 Proposed Open Lands Fees

- Kristi presented on the proposed 2020 Open Land Fees draft.
- The City of Helena is putting together a book of fees. Will be updating all of the Parks and Recreation fees to include open lands. These proposed fees will go before the commission in January. We felt it important to include some open lands fees as there has been several requests for special use permits on our open lands. With past use, we would typically waive fees for partners. We would just charge the application fee.

- Kristi stated this issue was mentioned in the chapter 7 rewrite. The recommendation was that open lands should have a more consistent, robust fee structure for events taking place on Helena open lands. This is a draft for your review.
- Brad reiterated that currently we only charge an application fee unless the person making the request would using an area for commercial use (selling product).
- Brad stated that we looked at other communities in Montana and based our structure on something similar.
- Kristi – on page one, the draft shows less than 150 and then 151 and more. Brad added that we also included non-resident and non-profit fees. Kristi added that with all of our fees this year, we have been directed to include resident vs. non-resident fees. Non-resident fees are based on a 12% increase over the resident fee for each respective fee.
- Ross – regarding the disc golf course, the draft shows a maximum of 200 attendees. Is that a maximum for the Folf course? Brad stated we have not had an event at the Folf course that was more than 100 people. We only have one or two events on open lands that have 200+ attendees.
- Brad added that these fees are on a cost-recovery basis. The city is responsible for trash management, cleanup, and use of the portable restroom. We used to have a fee for Donaldson Barn but we have decided we won't be renting that any longer.
- Kristi stated we will be rounding the non-resident fees up to the nearest dollar for ease and accounting purposes.
- Ross – what is the next step? Kristi stated we will take the proposed fees to the commission for approval. These fees will be included in a “book of fees” the the commission will approve all together.

“Draft” Chapter 7, Recreation Portion of the Open Lands Work Plan

- Kristi stated we included a draft copy of the Chapter 7, Recreation portion of the Open Lands Work Plan in the packets. This has been posted on our website and is out for public comment until December 20. There is survey capturing comments and we are also taking comments via email.
- When we come to the end of the comment period, we will compile them and begin reviewing them. Based on the comments, we may make changes to the draft. We will then finalize the document and take it to the commission in January.
- Nick asked about the fact that we started with CDR and brought in Deb Haliday. Kristi clarified that Deb Haliday was subcontracting for CDR. She has been facilitating public meetings.
- The contract with CDR was very detailed. Kristi offered a copy to the members upon request. This was a culmination of multiple companies that reached out with a RFP for a recreation trails plan. Kristi added that we were searching for a plan that was an over-arching plan, not site-specific. It needs to be broad enough to provide guidance and structure, but doesn't necessarily give specific details. We were looking for balance.
- Ross added he would have liked to seen more specifics on what public input will look like.
- Eric – there is an area in the open lands work plan that does address public input which is not included in chapter 7. Historically, HOLMAC had subcommittees (such as the Trails Subcommittee which is now housed under PPLT) that was focused on chapter 7. When there

is the parallel conversation regarding advisory boards, the level of interest of open lands should be included in the conversations.

- Brad agreed and added that subcommittee was tasked with trail specific issues.
- Kristi asked for clarification on the subcommittee housed with PPLT. Brad stated the only issue he had was that they dealt with Forest Service land and city open lands. It was difficult to stay focused. Brad suggested that if we have a subcommittee that focuses on city open lands, it should be very specific to city open lands.
- Eric encouraged board members to review the document and submit comments by December 20th.
- Kristi agreed and added that it will be helpful for substantive comments.

“Draft” Environment Analysis

- Brad stated we are initiating a new process in that we will now perform Environmental Analysis of projects. We did this for the VanHook Wetland Viewing Platform. The EA Brad presented is a PSR (Prevention, Suppression, Restoration) Project: Dry Gulch, Mountain Pine Beetle, and Western Spruce Budworm Management Project.
- This is a forest insect management project. We have applied for a grant from the DNRC. This EA is tied to the project proposal. We will forward this EA to all of our stakeholders. We will also post it on our website and accept comments for 30 days. Most of the impacts analyzed will be minimal. This proposed project area is located within Mount Ascension Natural Park, legally described as Government Lot 7 and Lot 20-A-1, Section 6, Township 9 North, Range and West, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, 46.557791 Decimal Degrees North, 112.039197 Decimal Degrees West. A portion of the Entertainment Trail dissects the project area (map attached). The proposed project area has seen an infestation of Douglas Fir Engraver Beetles and subsequent tree damage and mortality. The project area also has a significant Spruce Budworm infestation. To increase forest health and reduce further tree mortality, the project aims to modify timber stand conditions through the implementation of mechanical (hand work/chainsaw) falling, bucking and limbing and on-site chipping and pile burning. Therefore, we are looking at grants focused on bark beetle activity and Western Spruce Budworm activity.
- Many of the impacts are tied to noise and disturbance itself. If we have to burn, there will be smoke management. We will also have management of any ground disturbance that we have mitigated with seeding in the past. There will also be management of noxious weeds. This site does have some weed issues currently. There is significant thistle in this area as well as the under-story of the trees themselves. We are also looking at impact on wildlife and flora and fauna, and Brad has submitted a request to the National Heritage Center for a site-specific analysis of the different species of concern. We will make this a common practice when looking at these sites to make sure we aren't missing anything.
- This is open for comments the next 30 days. We will mail this out to stakeholders as well. We look to refine this process going forward. This will include maintenance projects, management projects, etc.
- The findings will be forwarded to the DNRC along with our grant proposal. The stakeholders will include those that were involved in the Chapter 7, Recreation update that has been developed. The template we used for our EA was based off of the state template.

- Comments:
 - ✚ When ask if this EA is a trend for the DNRC, Brad stated it is the trend for the fact that these are federal funds. The DNRC will do the analysis for private ownerships, but will require municipalities to do their own.
 - ✚ Brad was reminded that this is not a fuel reductions grant, but a “forest health” grant. This grant will not fund limb pruning or the management of dead trees. It funds activities that will lessen the likelihood of insect activity. In this area, we are recommending a basal area reduction. We are trying to create a healthier stand.
 - ✚ At this site, it will be too difficult to remove the material, so we would be unable to use the wood for the LEAP firewood program. The area is too remote.
 - ✚ On the treatment area in red, who borders that area. Brad stated that is the Helena National Forest Service. This project is confined to city ownership.
 - ✚ This project is 25 acres.
- In going back to the Chapter 7 rewrite, Kristi stated that HOLMAC can comment on the plan. You can do so as a committee or individually. That would be welcomed.
- Eric – how would we do that? A letter could be drafted and shared with the membership for approval.
- Ross – what is the process going forward in regards to the Chapter 7 rewrite? Kristi stated that she, Brad, Deb Haliday, and CDR will review all comments and decide, based on the comments (are they compelling or similar), what changes need to be done to the draft plan to reflect said comments. They will be included in the final draft that will go to the commission. Ultimately, they will approve the final draft.
- Ross would like more specifics on goals. Karen agreed on a little more detail, but not too specific. Ross stated he will draft a letter and share with the membership for approval. He will get this done by Monday, next week.

Subcommittee Reports

PPLT

- Nate stated he has recently returned from leave and will have a report for next month.
- He added that PPLT is in the process of defining how to move forward with the vacant position in light of Evan’s departure. He anticipates someone from PPLT will serve on this committee.

Other

- Ross asked Eric to summarize the Advisory Board Efficiencies meeting from November 15.
- Kristi stated we held a public meeting regarding advisory board efficiencies. The Parks Department currently staffs the following meetings:
 - ✚ City-County Parks Board
 - ✚ HOLMAC
 - ✚ Golf Advisory Board
 - ✚ Civic Center Board
- There were many in attendance. Deb Haliday facilitated the meeting. We received a lot of feedback from this meeting. Generally, people were most concerned about any elimination of any board, consolidations of boards, etc.

- We did get comments that people were interested in seeing the City-County Parks Board have more of an advisory function within Parks and Recreation.
- Kristi submitted a report to the commission with ideas and comments heard.
- There are some basic efficiencies that we can gain (such as audio minutes, meeting less frequently such as every other month or quarterly) that could help with efficiencies within the Parks Department.
- We are also looking at ways to have more synergy amongst our advisory groups.
- The commission has asked us to continue to work on this; however, their focus at this time is the Civic Center Board. There will be a resolution brought to the next commission meeting to dissolve the Civic Center Board as it is and begin looking at an advisory body for the Civic Center. There are no specifics on this as of yet.
- There was a commission meeting on December 11. Several members of the community spoke about their concerns not only for the Civic Center Board, but for the Golf Advisory Board.

Next Meeting Date: January 14, 2020

Future Agenda Items:

Adjournment:

- With no further business, Brian moved to adjourn the December 12, 2019 HOLMAC meeting. Karen seconded. Motion carried.

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