



**Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
October 28th, 2020 7:00pm
Via Zoom**

Meeting was called to order by Sumner Sharpe at 7:00pm

Attendance: Pat Marron, John Andrew, Timothy Chisman, Diana Hammer, Meg Bishop, Nancy Perry, Sumner Sharpe, Gary Dalton, Margaret Strachan, Tom Woodgerd, Ryan Schwochert, David Beach, TJ Lehman, Joseph Lehman, Jason Welnel, Ben Kennedy, Steve Allen, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet,

Excused: Dylan Klapmeier, Doris Davis, Samson Boyd, Tim Dwyer

Guests: City Manager Rachel Harlow-Schalk, David Knoepke (Director Transportation – City of Helena) Dr. G

A quorum was established.

Approval of September Minutes

No amendments, comments or changes to minutes. Stand approved.

Guest Presenter: David Knoepke – Director of Transportation Services, City of Helena

Snow removal – with extra staff on the morning shift the snow removal should be greatly improved this year. The department is removing snow in all the traditional areas of Helena, but also adding the areas of Larson, the hospital, the Capitol area, Rodney St. and the Helena Industries area. All trailers, boats and RVs must be off the roads from November 1st through April 15th. Courtesy notices will be placed on those that are not removed, but after that time frame has passed, the department will start towing.

Sidewalk snow removal – Residential sidewalks must be cleared 24 hours after the snow stops falling. Commercial area sidewalks must be cleared by 9:00am. On the City of Helena webpage, there is a banner entitled “Know the code”, it has a snow clock on it that states when the snow has stopped falling. There is also the MyHelena App where a citizen can request a service through Transportation, Public Works and the Parks Department. You made also add a picture to your request. For other sidewalk information or enforcement of the code: 447-1566 or email:

roadwaycodeenforcement@helenamt.gov and <https://www.helenamt.gov/know-the-code>

If there is a complaint about snow removal, the code enforcers go out and check, they then place a courtesy notice on the door. The code enforcers will go back and follow up the next day to see that the snow has been removed. Nancy Perry (who lives on

Broadway) complimented the city on the door hanger reminder given before the storm. She felt it was very effective. Nancy asked if alleys are plowed – David Knoepke said no, the plows are too large, but Solid Waste Department does provide plowing for the Garbage Trucks. Signage on Broadway St. says no parking from 8-5. Residents may receive a door hanger that reminds them if there are 2 inches of snow forecasted. If the plow has made its sweep of the area, and the snow has stopped falling, it is usually alright to park your car back on the street.

The plows are on the primary Main Snow Routes first during a snow event <https://www.helenamt.gov/know-the-code>, then they work their way to smaller residential streets.

Chelly Hasquest asks about shoveling width on sidewalk. David Knoepke says it has to be at least 48 inches to comply with ADA.

Tom Woodgerd says sometimes driveways get plowed in and there is a large berm created that is hard to remove. Transportation Department no longer has the high-gate arm on the plow to remedy this situation. There are local contractors hired however to help with potential driveway blockage.

Sumner Sharpe and Margaret Strachan state that sidewalks and street corners can get filled with piled up plowed snow creating icy areas. It seems the drains then don't work properly. If it becomes a large problem, a citizen can contact the Stormwater Division.

David Knoepke says Commercial Sidewalks are most often monitored from M thru F, but if a big storm comes through, there may be some weekend monitoring.

5 Point Intersections this actually includes 3 intersections, downtown traffic, and 2 way module study. The Transportation Department is receiving a report on data collected, vehicle counts and pedestrian counts. They are considering how to best utilize the width of Helena Ave. and Main St. and make them more conducive for traffic within the city.

How to improve access to Ward 6 and the Caird property via the 5 point intersection on Montana Ave. – David Knoepke says that access via “Malfunction Junction” is an issue both for cars, but especially for pedestrians. The access issue will try to get solved. The report will be available early November. David Knoepke will forward a copy to Peggy Benkelman who will then notify every HCC member.

Officer Reports:

Treasurer Report - Nancy Perry states the budget is the same from last month.

Coordinator Report: Peggy Benkelman continues to update the webpage, compile minutes and agendas and attend committees meetings. She is still expanding the District Email list.

HPAC Report – Boundy sculpture a bit delayed due to Parks Department. Parks may decide another location. HPAC is promoting to continue Ghost Sign Restoration within the City Limits. They would like to see money from city – TIF, BID or other funds allocated for it. Margaret Strachan is still concerned as to why HPAC will move under Facilities. She says she has phoned the Montana Local Governmental Center in Bozeman and spoken with Dan Clarke who says there is no Best Practices document that the city was referring to. <http://www.msulocalgov.org/> . Margaret feels that HPAC’s budget may be cut when it is placed under Facilities Department. Peggy Benkelman will continue to work at HCC at 20 hours per week, but it is up to Troy Sampson as to who to hire for the HPAC coordinator position. Margaret Strachan wants to make sure the City Departments value citizen input and take that in to account.

Neighborhood District Reports

Ryan Schwochert from District #5 noted there have been 2 to 3 encounters at Nature Park which required the police to be called. The area is behind the 6th hole on Bill Roberts golf course. It is the area by McHugh trailer park, Gold and Cole Avenues. Please be careful if you walk, ride or drive through the area at night. TJ Lehman (District #5) expressed his thanks to Ryan for noting issues. TJ says he has at times felt uncomfortable at night as well. The area has little lighting. Patrick Marron says if you encounter trouble in the area, please also contact the City of Helena Parks Department and perhaps they could help with new lights being installed, signage etc.

Committee Updates

Civic Center Board – John Andrew. The board will be releasing an RFP soon. It is to gather interest in persons/companies interested in becoming the new Civic Center manager. The RFP is currently in the hands of City attorney Jodoin for approval. The Civic Center has also created a new mission statement.

HCC Outreach Committee – Diana Hammer – HCC members are still being called to express their info regarding issues/ideas/concerns about their neighborhoods. Members may be asked to hang door-hangers, but not until about 2 weeks after the election. Peggy Benkelman is compiling newer email lists for each District. Please pass along the names of 10 neighbors’ emails if you have them to help build the size of the email lists. Meg Bishop – thinks the HCC should continue to promote “Speak Your Mind” link on the HCC webpage. She would like it to connect with the site “Next Door”.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Tom Woodgerd –At the last meeting, the danger of the crossing near Central School (Lawrence x Warren) was discussed and needs to be fixed/addressed. The new apartment complex (166 apartments) at the North End of Benton Ave. has parking issues. The apartments are full and the streets are narrow, so everyone is parking on the sidewalks, leaving no where to walk or bike. The developers seemed to have maximized the “fill” with as many apartments as possible leaving no parks, open land or playground areas. It was questioned previously, Is this how we want Helena developed?

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth-Barber – there is a zoom meeting that everyone on the HCC is invited to attend regarding Helena’s recycling future on November 10th. Peggy Benkelman will sent out the Zoom invite/information.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – This committee recently had a guest speaker, Jill Cohenour, a State Senator. She spoke on water quality, water rights when property is transferred, and river basin councils. Of mention, was a lawsuit where the City of Bozeman was sued by the DNRC and a utility solutions company, the HCC may want to keep abreast of the suit. The Beaver creek Restoration Project was also discussed at the meeting. Willow pinning is being performed as a part of the restoration. Diana Hammer will share the annual report with everyone on HCC when it is released.

Old Business

Bylaw Amendment vs. Conflict of Interest Form

Bob Habeck supports ensuring that HCC members fulfill their oath of office. He doesn’t feel that there needs to be a Bylaw change, maybe just an addition to the HCC member guideline packet. The new guideline document will provide clarification when it is necessary for an HCC member to recuse him/herself. Bob feels he has already taken an oath of office and doesn’t see the need for a separate policy form with signature – especially since the Mayor and Commissioners don’t sign a conflict of interest form. Meg Bishop wants to ensure that the HCC membership fully understands when they need to recuse themselves. Denise Roth-Barber reminds us that the purpose of the HCC is to make recommendations not decisions. The HCC can make decisions internally as an organization. Denise does approve of some sort of guideline document. Sumner suggests that Bob Habeck and Peggy Benkelman work on a new document that provides guidelines for HCC members about how and when to recuse themselves.

Westside Development

Patrick Marron stated that Mike McConnell of Planning Department says decisions on the development have already been made and it is too late for changes. Mike McConnell said the engineering, traffic studies, open space and water run-off studies have been completed, approved and sent to other city departments. Sumner Sharpe’s discussion with Sharon Haugan suggests the city has not yet signed off formally on the subdivision development – they were still discussing water/sewer issues.

Neighborhood issues identified included: snowfall really limits travel in the area as it makes narrow streets with cars parked on them even narrower. An additional 350 cars two times a day will create severe issues. This impacts both HCC district #1 and district #3. The city should perform its due diligence regarding a traffic study and provide more input from neighborhood residents.

Retaining open space and providing for active recreation other than trails within the development is a concern. 103 single family units with 72 condos are planned and concern was expressed about this level (density) of development. The development was platted in the 1970s along a large slope/storm drainage area. It may be difficult to change the plans of it. Sumner Sharpe will speak with Mike McConnell to get better clarification on the development and how there can be more valued input from the neighbors. The HCC will keep informed about the development and promote an

interactive neighborhood meeting. There needs to be more engagement and a better notification system for pre-applications for developments/subdivisions within the city.

HPAC Moving to Facilities Department

Peggy Benkelman has not been fully informed as to when the move will occur. She is currently working with Facilities Department head Troy Sampson to finish up current projects. Peggy was told that she will continue to work her 20 hrs per week with the HCC and that HPAC will hire someone internally from their department to coordinate HPAC. Peggy will work with Facilities during the transition period.

New Business

DeFord Woodchip Trail discussion and recommendation

The recommendation was shown on the Zoom screen. Meg Bishop explained more of the details about the trail. A motion was made to approve the recommendation.

Discussion ensued. Tim Chisman asked if anyone discussed the impact that the trail change may have on people that live near the trail. Meg Bishop states there are not many house near the trail. TJ Lehman says at the last HOLMAC meeting, Brad Langsather (City of Helena Open Lands Manager) suggests it may be difficult to achieve ADA compliance on the DeFord trail. Denise Roth-Barber says she personally fully supports the idea of having the trail support wheelchair and slow-users. Another HCC member says that the local Rotary club has raised funds to have an ADA trail on Mt. Helena.

A vote was taken:19 Yea and 1 Nay. The recommendation will be submitted to the Mayor and the Commission.

Open HCC Representative Position on HOLMAC (Helena Open Lands Management Advisory Committee)

Sumner Sharpe states that one person (TJ Lehman) expressed interest in serving on HOLMAC, is there anyone else that is interested – please speak up now. TJ says he will gladly report back to the HCC on the meetings of HOLMAC. He understands the distinction of personal interests vs. HCC objective representation. Meg Bishop is leary of having another Mountain Biking advocate on the HOLMAC. She would like to see a better balance there with various users and conservationists. As there are no other HCC members interested in serving on HOLMAC, Sumner Sharpe accepts TJ Lehman as the HCC representative on the HOLMAC.

Public Comment

Sumner Sharpe along with Diana Hammer support having better public involvement and Best Practices regarding the future of Helena's Trail System and Open Lands. The HCC will set up a presentation/interactive forum on the subject including Kristi Ponzoso (Parks Dept.), Brad Langsather (Open Lands Mgr) and others who are knowledgeable or represent trail and open lands organizations.

Tom Woodgerd does suggest Helena needs to get ahead of the influx of Electric Bicycles in our community. There needs to be better awareness, regulation and planning about interactions with them on trails and on our streets.

Meeting was Adjourned at 8:59PM

Next Meeting is November 18th at 7:00pm via Zoom