



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
September 22, 2021 7:00pm
Via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by HCC Chair Dylan Klapmier at 7:01pm

Attendance: Pat Marron, John Andrew, Tim Chisman, Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Sumner Sharpe, Gary Dalton, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert, James Colegrove, Karen Wilson, John Walden, Heidi Freidlander, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet, Susan Steffens, Mike Rooney
Peggy Benkelman(coordinator)

Excused: Joe Lehman, Margaret Strachan, Tom Woodgerd, Samson Boyd, TJ Lehman, Ben Kennedy, Steve Allen, Bob Habeck

Guests: Kara Snyder (City of Helena Housing Coordinator), Sharon Haugen (Community Development City of Helena), Mike O'Neil (Helena Housing Authority) Dr. G Thomas, Luke Harris

A Quorum was established

Approval of August Minutes – No changes or additions, minutes stand approved.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items – None

Guest Speakers

Michael O'Neil – Helena Housing Authority

HHA (Helena Housing Authority) has provided affordable housing in Helena since 1939. HHA provides:

1. Public Housing
 - a. Specific properties in Helena for people that are at the poverty level.
266 residences in Stewart Homes and another 158 homes throughout the Helena area.
The Public Housing in Helena is aging and in the future, there needs to be major redevelopment of the properties.
2. Housing Voucher Program or Section 8. This program is for those in extreme poverty.
 - a. Includes working with the homeless
 - b. Partner with the VA – the VA area provides homeless housing as well.

The challenges for housing and the homeless have never been greater due to COVID and the market with homes' increasing in value. 82% of the housing is for the poor who have 30% below average income. This includes those on a fixed income and those with disabilities.

Tax income credit is a good way to provide low-income housing. The HHA works with private landlords in the area to make this work. Michael O'Neil encourages those of you that are a landlords, or know of landlords, please encourage them to participate in this program. Many of the long-standing properties that have participated in this program, have now dropped out because they can make much more money on rents now. Montana is the only state that does not provide a tax credit from the statewide general fund for low-income residents.

Michael praises the City of Helena for some of the recent work it has been doing:

1. Changes in zoning will help create more affordable housing.
2. TIF in the Capital Mall area now includes the Stewart Homes area.
3. The Cruze Ave. revisioning project will also include low-income housing.

The cost of doing nothing for the homeless is costly! Saint Peter's Health, United Way and the Helena Housing Authority have studied the cost of homelessness and have concluded that it drives up health care costs as well as costs within the criminal justice system.

Michael O'Neil also mentions there needs to be more training provided in Helena to serve those with mental health issues.

Sharon Haugen – Community Development City of Helena

Sharon thanks Michael from HHA for all the work he has done over the last 30 years. She then introduces Kara Snyder.

Kara Snyder – City of Helena Housing Coordinator

Kara mentions she has been working for the city for only 6 months. The city wants to be a part of the solution regarding homelessness in Helena. On the City of Helena Community Development webpage: <https://www.helenamt.gov/government/departments/community-development/planning/housing-matters>

It shows a 1. Housing Needs Assessment 2. Growth Policy 3. Housing Strategy.

4. The City of Helena has also updated its building codes to include more infill development.

5. Developers who intend to build to serve those that are 60% below median income range, will receive a reduction and waiver of development costs – this can be substantial. 6. Establishment of the Housing Navigator Position within the city and county. This position has been very helpful. 7. Housing Trust Fund established. It now has \$1.9m in its account, but this still is not a sufficient amount to make a big improvement with housing issues.

Please look at the survey posted on BeHeardHelena and participate: <https://beheardhelena.com/>

Kara also mentions that there is a big commitment on the City's part to have a housing coordinator position. In the Helena area there are several organizations that consider housing issues: Helena Resource Advocates, Housing Task Force. There have been a few recent grants issued, they are: 1. Community Block Grant (this grant involves property with Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church) a 2. Housing Grant (for single family rehabs), 3. ARPA Funds to rehab the YWCA to increase its capacity, 4. Habitat for Humanity wants to rehab a house & garage then give it over to the Land Trust to sell and make money.

HCC Member Karen Wilson asks how many homeless people are in Helena? And, because the referendum on Landlords not being able to raise or collect rent has been lifted, how many persons do you predict will be displaced? Michael O'Neil says it is hard to count the homeless, but he believes the numbers are up 20%. A third of the people enrolled in his programs are homeless. There is a huge disconnect with salaries in the area and lack of affordable housing. For example: Carroll College hired several teachers, but they turned down the job because they could not find affordable acceptable housing.

Tim Chisman HCC Member – asks when do you think the Cruze Ave. visioning project will be started and will it include more public housing downtown? Sharon Haugen answers that currently Morrison/Mairle is performing a survey of the project costing the city \$60K. They are also doing a 30% design project at a cost of \$120K. Michael O'Neil says he feels the master vision may be ready in 2 years – HHA owns property in the Cutler/State St. area, so they are very interested in the project.

HCC Member Chelly Hasquet says she has had several residents contact her about the transient persons living near Women's Park & Anchor Park. Several children walking home from Central School have had adverse interactions with them. Sharon Haugen says the city of Helena is aware and they are working with God's Love, Salvation Army and United Way to try to solve the issues. Maybe temporary housing/shelters can be placed somewhere. Sharon states that Helena has always had a homelessness problem, it just seems to be more visible

now. Sharon mentions places like Memorial Apartments no longer house low income persons, they have decided to raise the rent as much as \$400 more per month. Chelly Hasquet asks that temporary housing not be placed near schools.

Michael O'Neil re-iterates that permanent housing is the best solution to homelessness.

Nancy Perry asks if Helena or the state of Montana can freeze rents so landlords do not have the ability to keep raising them? Both Sharon Haugen and Mike O'Neil reply no, under state law, no provisions for freezing rents.

Dylan Klapmeier asks what the city is doing because there is a lack of supply of affordable housing in Helena? Sharon Haugen answers:

- 1.City allows for extra accessible dwelling on lots within the city.
- 2.Increase building height
- 3.Waiver of development fees – e.g. Red Alder waived \$200K worth of permitting fees
- 4.Encourage more infill/building in the downtown area
- 5.New RU district which has smaller lots for duplexes.

Sharon H. also mentions that 10% of TIF monies will be used to bolster affordable housing.

Michael O. says it makes sense to build within city limits because the cost of land has become so expensive to purchase.

Sharon H. reminds the HCC about the formation of the Trust Fund and consider if they may want to be on that board. Again, look at BeHeardHelena.

Reports of Officers

Chair – Dylan Klapmeier

Reminds everyone to fill out Trust Fund Survey on BeHeardHelena. HCC cannot be involved with upcoming elections, but there are several candidate forums coming up. Hometown Helena tomorrow morning and Oct. 7th 6:30pm at Helena Ave. Theatre – must wear masks.

A Nominating Committee is being formed with Sumner Sharpe as chair. Dylan Klapmeier, Sumner Sharpe and Nancy Perry can no longer run for their respective positions because they have already served two consecutive terms. They can however, run for a different Ex. Committee position. If any of you are interested in running for an HCC office, please contact Sumner Sharpe.

Vice-Chair Sumner Sharpe – no update, nothing new to report.

Treasurer – Nancy Perry – Outreach Committee making several purchases for more professional display: laminated map, enlarged laminated photos, retractable banner and tablecloth with logo. Bentonia/District #1 had a neighborhood outreach party.

John Andrew – Secretary – John mentions there are still openings for HCC members to attend Commission meetings in December.

HCC Coordinator – Peggy Benkelman – Peggy says she continues to update webpage and Facebook page. She works in tandem with both the Executive Committee and the Outreach Committee. She thanks Chelly Hasquet for helping with the design idea of the windows at the Goodkind building. The November HCC meeting should be moved up a week to accommodate for Thanksgiving holiday.

Commission Attendees Reports –

Karen Wilson: The Craftsman subdivision was approved with 400 houses. Discussion about the roadways within the old Capital Hill mall area: developer wanted exception to road width. New rules about road width were just implemented, Karen wonders why the Commission would consider exemption to the new rules.

Ryan Schwochert: The City Fire Chief has retired. New police officers have been hired. Project 19-38, a groundwater wells project is being implemented and intends to have new wells in the

Valley operational by 2025. *O'Keefe Drilling* is drilling 3 test wells at the cost of \$430K. The city thinks this will help with the extreme drought in coming years.

Susan Steffens: Affordable housing was the discussion at the meeting she attended – again, please add value to the survey on BeHeardHelena. HB701 Marijuana Laws, says only medical providers can sell marijuana. Where to allow marijuana smoking within the city was discussed. The Civic center board still has now determined decision about the future of the Civic Center. The city noise ordinance was also discussed.

Committee Updates

Outreach Committee – Diana Hammer – Diana mentions that Nancy Perry covered new spending already. Sumner Sharpe thanks Diana for securing the Goodkind building window. He also mentions that the committee is working on long term strategies and better ways to receive the public's input.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – no update this meeting

Civic Center – John Andrew – The steering committee will meet on October 28th – it will probably be its last meeting.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Tom Woodgerd – excused, no report

Transportation Coordinating Committee – Joe Lehman excused, no report

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – this month's meeting was moved. Next month they are touring East Helena slag pile and how it affects water quality.

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth Barber – we can't hear Denise, so Diana speaks: the City of Helena has released an RFP for the plan to incorporate the new Waste Reduction policies. The Sustainability Coordinator position has been re-advertised. It is only part-time. It was offered to one candidate but it was ultimately turned down, so the city decided to re-advertise and open it up to a new pool of candidates. The City does tell each candidate that this position will most likely grow into a full-time position.

Ryan Schwochert – Golf Course Advisory Board – Ryan says; currently there is no restaurant manager and no golf-pro at the Bill Roberts gold course. Ryan also mentions that the course is the largest public managed space within the city and it is used in both the winter and summer months. Ryan also says that during the last 18 of 24 months, the course was turning a profit.

No more committee updates.

Open discussion for New Business Topics – none addressed.

Dylan Klapmeier mentions that Peggy Benkelman will work with both the City PIO and City Manager to get results from BeHeardHelena surveys. This may spur on new topics for discussion.

The October meeting may include snow removal and plowing for the winter months.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:52 PM

Next meeting will be October 27, 7:00PM, 2021 through Zoom.

