



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
October 27, 2021 7:00pm
Via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by HCC Chair Dylan Klapmier at 7:00pm

Attendance: Pat Marron, John Andrew, Tim Chisman, Diana Hammer, Joe Lehman, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Mike Rooney, Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strahan, Gary Dalton, Tom Woodgerd, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert, TJ Lehman, Karen Wilson, John Walden, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet, Susan Steffens
Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

Excused: Samson Boyd, Steve Allen, James Colegrove, Heidi Friedlander

Guests: David Knoepke (Director of Transportation City of Helena) Chris Couey (Deputy Director of Transportation) Kyle Joyner, Dr. Gregory Thomas, Jess (?)

A Quorum was established

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

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items – Dr. Gregory Thomas speaks: He says Helena has been his adopted home for over 10 years and that he has attended almost all Commission meetings for the last 3 years. He asks the HCC not to confuse affordable housing with homelessness. Affordable housing issues should address the wage parity. In Montana, non-trade jobs are 20-50% below the national average. There are many jobs left open locally and nationally. Should we provide subsidized housing for those that want to remain in those low wage jobs and not improve their lives through self-teaching/learning new skills or getting additional education? How much will it ultimately cost our community if we fail to recognize the long-term impacts this wage parity will cost.

We should recognize that homelessness is a symptom of something else. In the late 60's and 70's, laws were changed to make it illegal to have involuntary commitments for the mentally ill. A lot of what we see today as homelessness is really a symptom of mental health. We need to address mental health as aggressively as we address physical health.

Our laws prohibit people from loitering, camping and living on our streets. These laws need to be enforced. We must consider local, county and state laws together. Seventy-five (75%) percent of our homeless population originate from other counties in Montana, and/or other areas of the US. These people like to come here because of our generosity and social programs. These social programs and non-profits are often understaffed, underfunded and overwhelmed. Again, there are over 10 million job openings throughout the US. People could easily find work right now. Some homeless persons interviewed, self-report that they choose to be homeless.

In the US last year, 93,000 Americans lost their lives due to opiates. Drug and alcohol use is a huge problem in the US especially within the homeless population.

Helena is a small city with a huge budget of \$100million, but strangely cannot provide sidewalks and road improvements. We need to be careful about launching new expensive social programs in Helena. We don't need to mimic other cities around Montana that are initiating such programs at such a high cost.

Guest Speakers: David Knoepke (City of Helena Transportation Director) Chris Couey (Deputy Director of Transportation) <https://www.helenamt.gov/know-the-code/>

This year's snowplowing will be similar to last year. They will still be using winter sand mix starting with emergency snow routes first, then primary routes. Peggy will forward the maps to HCC

members via David Knoepke. In the event Helena gets about 12 inches of snow, the city does contract with local people for both motor patrol and road grading. Snow removal has different characteristics in different neighborhoods. The city will continue the use of snow gates (explanation of snow gates further on in notes). November 1st through April 15th recreational vehicles, trailers etc. will be towed. There now is one exception: a Contractor's trailer gets an exemption for a 7-10 day permit. The City Manager can authorize this short-term permit. She can also authorize for an RV to stay in place for 7 days or less, as long as it is heading out of town within that time limit.

7-8-5: PARKING OF TRAILERS, RECREATIONAL VEHICLES, AND BOATS; TOWING:

A. Unless a permit has been issued pursuant to [7-8-5\(C\)](#) or (D), trailers, recreational vehicles, boats, or other stored items may not be parked or stored within the public right-of-way between November 1 and April 15.

B. Any trailer, recreational vehicle, boat, or other stored items parked or stored in violation of [7-8-5\(A\)](#) may be towed and stored at the expense of the registered owner.

C. The City Manager has the authority to issue a permit to any contractor working on an active construction project occurring within city limits that will allow the contractor to park or store a construction trailer or trailers within the public right-of-way between November 1 and April 15.

D. From November 1 to April 15, the City Manager has the authority to issue a short-term permit to a person who, because of extraordinary circumstances, has no option but to park a trailer, recreational vehicle, or other stored item within the public right-of-way. The short-term permit will allow the person to park the trailer, recreational vehicle, or other stored item within the public right-of-way for up to seventy-two (72) hours. (Ord. 3243, 10-29-2018; amd. Ord. 3287, 2-22- 2021)

Tom Woodgerd says thanks for using the Snowgate apparatus, it saves his driveway from being plowed in.

Sumner Sharpe asks if people will be given advanced notice before their vehicle is towed? David K. says yes, with public announcements etc. Sumner S. states will uncleared sidewalks still be a problem? David K. replies a person can report an uncleared sidewalk either by phone or on *MyHelenaApp*. There is also a new program being established called Snowbusters. It will be comprised of volunteers who shovel sidewalks for those that cannot. The program needs clearance from both the HR department and MMIA before it can commence. Sumner S. also suggests that it be publicized through AARP and the Senior Center. David K. says yes, they will promote the program.

Dylan Klapmeier asks if the Transportation Department/snowplowing info is in the queue for use with the *BeHeardHelena* survey tool? David Knoepke says not yet, but they did conduct a survey back in 2019. David K. mentions that during a big snow storm, crews hours are extended for 24 hour coverage.

Nancy Perry asks what a snowgate is? As a blade pushes the snow, it moves sideways away from the driveway to alleviate the problem of having driveways blocked by snow.

Nancy Perry also asks about the HCC Capital Transit Bus Recommendation. David K. replies that most probably there will be improved signage for the Bus. They have suspended the East Valley and East Helena Bus routes. It is more problematic to add new routes. A full route on a fixed route takes a full hour which is the maximum that a para-traveler should wait. The City cannot expand this wait time especially by adding additional stops. The Commission did ask

about adding another different route and/or eliminating fixed routes to a more Dial-A-Ride concept like Kalispell did. Capital Transit is updating its software and you can now pay through an app and also have a component for demand response.

TJ Lehman asks about evident traffic study on McHugh Avenue. David K. responds that the speed signs were installed more for traffic calming and education. The city doesn't typically download this information. True traffic studies are done by contractors. The city is working towards getting those online. If you want more information, please email David Knoepke, Chris Couey, or Mark Young. TJ Lehman asks what triggered the traffic calming? David K. responds there were numerous areas where there have been calls, complaints and concerns.

Ryan Shwochert asks about the possibility that Cole to Gold Ave. may get paved in the future? David K. says that area is not included in their timeline. The residents can request an SID to bring improvements to the area.

Sumner Sharpe states a couple of years ago there was a study done about local street improvements and several streets in need of the most repair/rebuilding were identified e.g. Clark St. Sumner S. asks if the city is still using this study? David K. replies that he and Chris Couey are working on a pavement analysis and are planning on using those index numbers for a capital improvement program.

David Knoepke says it is difficult to preserve the older streets. They are looking into ways to renovate at a lesser cost. It is hard to update the older streets with bump outs and ADA crossings.

Sumner Sharpe thinks maybe a special assessment may be necessary to help with the cost. David K. says they are working on that and will include the HCC in their decision making process. Perhaps an SID that collaborates with both the city and adjacent landowners.

Dylan Klapmeier asks about the snow removal budget. In years like last year when there is little snow, does the money budgeted get carried over if not used for snow removal. David K. says no – it is not carried over into the next year's budget. They are trying to build a Snow Reserve Fund so that money doesn't get lost each year when there is little to no snow.

John Andrew thanks the Transportation department for attending a block party meeting about snowplowing and emergency vehicles in areas with narrow streets.

Susan Steffens thanks David Knoepke on the great work at Rodney St.

Officer Reports:

Chair – Dylan Klapmeier – nothing new to add.

Vice-Chair – Sumner Sharpe – reminder if you want to nominate anyone or run for HCC Executive Committee office, please contact him.

Treasurer – Nancy Perry – nothing new to add, she did not spend any money this month.

Secretary – John Andrew – no new updates

Commission Attendees' Reports:

Nancy Perry – attended the 9/29 Administrative Commission Meeting. The Commission discussed how both the city and the commission can better communicate with the public. The city manager has even worked with individual residents to resolve issues. A good example is the movement of power poles in a District #2 alley.

The City has a new Communication Plan which will; 1. Involve each city department and how they all should communicate with the public in the same way. 2. The city should utilize the same medium of communication e.g. email, Facebook, in-person etc. 3. The form of communication

needs to be consistent. 4. If contractors are hired, they need to use the same communication method.

At the 9/13 Commission Meeting – Commissioner Dean asked the HCC their opinion on homelessness. Budget carry-overs from year to year were also discussed. Nancy P. learned that some of that carry over can get re-appropriated and this year it is to the tune of \$23.8million. One example is providing warm storage for trash trucks. They are expensive, and cold starts ruin their transmissions faster. The Daughters of the Confederacy would like to have their fountain back. They donated it to the city in 1916. Per Commissioner O’Loughlin, discussion about it needs to be an official agenda item.

Susan Steffens attended the 10/4 Commission Meeting – The city of Helena received money through the CARES ACT and the Department of Commerce. Money will go towards Habitat for Humanity and the purchase/building of two houses and the YWCA for more improvements to their building. The ADA trail on Mt. Helena was discussed. Residents were upset because they felt the city did not involve them in the decision making process. Dylan Klapmeier has been on it, and says it is mostly completed. Nancy Perry says it is no more than 8 feet in width but there may be a problem with how level it is (how this effects wheelchair usage). Maybe the HCC can get an update from the City Manager or Parks department. TJ Lehman thought maybe people complained because the alignment was not the same as what was discussed.

John Andrew attended the 10/18 Commission meeting. The bulk of the conversations were about the Capital Hill Mall area. Apparently the side streets are not meeting the correct standards and there were emergency vehicle response issues, so Stahly engineering had to correct those problems.

Chelly Hasquet attended the 10/27 meeting. Chelly said that Capital Transit signs will now be made in braille and other languages. Three quarters of the funding for the golf course has been achieved. The city has the possibility of having a \$402,000 grant, however because it is religious in nature, the city attorney is having to see if the city can receive it legally. The Commission reminds everyone to use *BeHeardHelena* to keep updated about what they are working on.

Tim Chisman listened in on the Commission meeting that discussed the open container laws. There are many options on the table. The city manager is recommending a process to waive the insurance requirements – for example if you want to have a small birthday party in the park, you don’t need a \$1M policy for the event. They are also trying to make the form easier for non-profit applications.

Coordinator Report - Peggy Benkelman – Peggy B. reports she continues to update the webpage and make Facebook posts. She compiles minutes and agendas as well. The display window at 6th Ave. x Last Chance Gulch has been taken down. Please remember to vote.

Committee Updates

Outreach Committee – Sumner Sharpe says that the Outreach Committee is putting together a final internal report for adoption by the HCC. It will be presented at the November meeting.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – TJ attended the meeting on 10/12. The Parks department is still determining its major projects and they are still in the comment period. So if you would like to add a comment, please go to *BeHeardHelena* <https://beheardhelena.com/> site and submit your feedback by November 15.

https://www.helenamt.gov/fileadmin/user_upload/Parks/Documents/Open_Lands_Documents/Open_Lands_General_Documents/Update_HOLMAC_Combined_Trail_Projects_2021_City_Recommendations_Final_10062021.pdf

Civic Center – John Andrew – Major Collins asked for further discussion about having a non profit manage the Civic Center. John Andrew sits on the Civic Center Steering Committee and

they will have another meeting in the near future. John A. will keep the HCC informed.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Tom Woodgerd- Tom was not able to attend the last meeting as he had a conflict. He is stepping down from HCC, so this position on this advisory board will be open in January.

Transportation Coordinating Committee – Joe Lehman attends these quarterly meetings, last one was 9/14. There are several big projects on their agenda. Some examples are Custer Ave, Benton Ave pedestrian crossing, sidewalks in the 6th Ward. Please refer to projects sheet that our coordinator will send out to you.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – At the September meeting they toured the Asarco Plant/Superfund Clean-up site. There has been great progress on the removal of contaminants: Arsenic & Selenium, helping the groundwater remain cleaner. Prickly Pear Land Trust will be taking over parts of the site helping it to become part of the Greenway Project along Prickly Pear Creek. At the October meeting Tim Burton, [Executive Director of the League of Cities and Towns](#), was the speaker. His focus was on [the problem of nutrient pollution \(e.g., nitrogen, phosphorus\)](#) in our water. This past Legislature passed new legislation changing the standards from numerical [back](#) to a narrative standard [so](#) municipalities could better [comply with water quality standards and](#) maintain good water quality.

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth Barber – Denise RB states the city did hire a new part-time sustainability coordinator – Holly Chandler. The city has also asked that the CCB help with the xeriscape garden at the new Justice building site. Also at 6th x Last Chance Gulch was a display in the window that the Citizen Conservation Board put together. The city has narrowed down its choices to 2 firms to manage the waste reduction in Helena. There is a steering committee being formed to organize the masterplan. Denise RB will be a part of this committee.

Ryan Schwochert – Golf Course Advisory Board – The golf course still needs to hire a golf pro and they are also looking to hire a food and beverage manager for Muni's restaurant. Ryan S. says there were 43000 rounds of golf in 2021 big increase in usage from 2020. The course also held a Frisbee Golf Tournament and will again have Cross Country skiing this winter.

Discussion – Open Comments

Margaret Strahan says there is a City/County mental health board that perhaps HCC should have representation on. Putting people with mental health issues in jail is not the answer. There are better ways to serve these people. Currently there is no room in our jails because of lack of employees to work there. There have been 2 attempted suicides in the last month, probably due to overcrowding.

Dylan Klapmeier agrees with Margaret S. and says at the first of 2022 the HCC should revisit what boards it wants to have seats on. Margaret also says there is a housing board that incorporates several organizations. The HCC should have a seat on it as well.

Sumner Sharpe reiterates that the Nominating Committee will be reaching out with phone calls soon. If you want to run for an officer position and/or nominate someone else for a position, please contact Sumner Sharpe, Bob Habeck or Tom Woodgerd.

Recommendation Presented and open for discussion. Peggy brings the document onto the zoom screen. All HCC members were emailed the document and given ample time for review.

Sumner Sharpe gave the example of why this document was needed. He mentioned the Capital Bus Recommendation and how we, the HCC, never received a formal response about our recommendation.

Ben Kuiper was surprised that there wasn't a formal process in place before now. He wondered if anyone had reached out the Commission? Dylan Klapmeier said yes, there had been

discussions but the HCC felt they needed more concrete answers and a better process.

Bob Habeck supports the recommendation. He said former Mayor Jim Smith used to come to every HCC January meeting where a yearly work plan was discussed. Bob H. feels that the HCC's recommendations should, at the very least be read into the record (minutes) of the Commission meetings. Margaret Strachan agrees with Bob H., but more than just being read into the record, she feels the HCC should be given the courtesy of a response even if it is "do nothing" about a recommendation.

Diana Hammer likes the idea of a yearly workplan. Both she and Bob feel upon seating of new HCC members in January, a work plan should be developed and include ad hoc committees. Dylan Klapmeier feels the HCC has done a good job in moving in this direction. In January, the HCC will require all members to fill out an application form so we have a better idea of professions etc. There will also be strategy planning session at our first January meeting.

Margaret Strachan makes a motion to accept the recommendation as presented. Ryan Schwochert seconds the motion.

Chair Dylan K opens the floor for more discussion. No further comments. A vote is taken and it is unanimous to accept the recommendation.

Another goal is to use the Civic Center for more in person meetings should COVID subside a bit. It is a much larger venue with more open space and ease of social distancing. HCC hopes to continue to utilize zoom in a hybrid fashion.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:49 PM

Next meeting will be November 17, 7:00PM, 2021 through Zoom.

Recommendation approved is below

Date: October 27, 2021

To: Helena City Commission

From: Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)

Subject: **Consideration of HCC Recommendations**

Dear Mayor and Commissioners,

According to the City Charter, the Helena Citizens' Council is composed of four elected representatives from each of the city's seven neighborhood districts. The HCC is charged with making recommendations to the Commission relating to the city budget and the future development of the city.

The HCC votes on formal recommendations to the Commission on a variety of topics of importance to the community. Recommendations are generated by HCC members or members of the public with thoughtful debate, consideration, and time. **Therefore, the HCC recommends the following as the Commission considers recommendations that are passed to them:**

The recommendation process become formalized by reading and discussing HCC recommendations as agenda items in the public Administrative or Commission meetings. Further, the Commission, through the Mayor or City Manager, report back to the HCC on the Commissioner's opinions of HCC recommendations and any actions that the city might explore as a result.

Finally, that the City Commission utilize the HCC as a forum to generate public input, discuss, debate, and make recommendations on topics of community importance that are before the Commission.

These actions will create a long-term framework to expand two-way communication between the HCC and the Commission while growing citizen participation in municipal government within our community. We are also open to alternative ways the Commission would like to promote the spirit of two-way communication between our representative bodies.

Thank you for your consideration.