



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)  
Minutes  
February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021 7:00pm  
Via Zoom

**Meeting was called to order by Dylan Klapmier at 7:05pm**

**Attendance:** Pat Marron, John Andrew, Timothy Chisman, Diana Hammer, Meg Bishop, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Mike Rooney, Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strachan, Colleen Murphy, Tom Woodgerd, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert, TJ Lehman, Ben Kennedy, Steve Allen, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet, Jamie Dwyer, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

**Excused:** Samson Boyd, Jason Welnel, Joe Lehman, David Beach, Gary Dalton

**Guests:** Paul Pacini, Dr. G, Dan Barry, Bill Crane, Lannie & Bergetta Hubbard, Katherine Jacobsen, Carol and Mark Eichler, Dillon Key, Vicky Soderberg, Sara Johnson, Amanda Reese, Kathy Maloy, Bill Lombardi, Joan Miles, Tony Jewett, Cole Johnson, Michele Webster, Matt McKinney, Lisa Bay, Jim McGrane, David Nimick, Angie Leprohon, Tom Eden, Heidi Freidlander and many others (#70)

**A Quorum was established**

**Approval of January Minutes**

Moved to March 2021 Meeting

**Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items**

No comments shared.

**Old Business**

**Update on Capital T Bus Signage Recommendation Paul Pacini and John Andrew**

John Andrew along with Paul Pacini and Nancy Perry wrote the recommendation. Paul Pacini discussed at the HCC January Meeting what an effective city bus system should provide. The word "Bus" should be prominently displayed along with the routes at all stops. John A. spoke with Elroy Goleman (City of Helena Transit Superintendent) regarding how to maximize the use of the bus system here in Helena. Elroy likes the recommendation but may be concerned about funding.

Paul Pacini speaks – he says Helena is lucky to have Capital T, but thinks the city is missing an important opportunity to provide service to all people including visitors. Visitors have no idea where or how to "catch" the bus. Routes need to be displayed better. Information on how and what to pay needs to be displayed. Residential routes are missing. Paul says he would like to have a functioning, convenient, practical bus system. Helena is close to having one, but needs to include these important elements.

Discussion on the recommendation ensued:

Sumner Sharpe says it is a very practical recommendation/suggestion. His experience throughout the US and Europe notes that all bus stations have route/cost explanations.

Nancy Perry – Helena needs an adequate bus system as there is only one taxi in Helena.

Ben Kuiper asks if a cost estimate was established. Paul Pacini says no., but Helena is one of the larger cities in Montana and should be able to handle the cost.

John Andrew states there has been vandalism at bus stops around Helena, but there should still be permanent posting of routes, fares and schedules.

Dylan Klapmeier thinks it is a good recommendation, but he thinks the bus system should be somewhat self-sustaining.

**Motion:** Sumner Sharpes moves to accept the recommendation as written and hopes the City Commission will support it and place it into consideration in the upcoming budget.

Meg Bishop seconds the motion. A voice vote was taken. It was unanimous in favor of the motion to accept the recommendation. No abstentions.

## **New Business**

### **E Bike Recommendation – updates, discussion**

Peggy Benkelman asks if a member of the public wishes to speak, please state name and address.

Meg Bishop HCC district Rep. #2, says this discussion is limited to Helena's Open Land and Ebikes. Highlights of the recommendation are included in the attachments. The premise of the recommendation is that Ebikes are motorized. The policy suggestion is based on policy from other towns and is consistent with Federal Policy e.g. United States Forest Service (USFS). Currently there are hundreds of miles of opportunities for motorized trail use in the Helena Area. According to Jennifer Becar (acting Public Affairs Officer of the L&C Helena National Forest) there are 800 miles of trails and 2500 miles of roads for motorized vehicles. Currently, Helena's trails are designated for non-motorized use, creating an unenforceable mosaic of use. According to Forest Service Trail Management Rule, they don't allow for motorized vehicles on trails. Missoula, Moab, Boise and others, recognize the conflicts of multiple use; safety, liability for the city, lithium batteries as a potential fire hazard. Plus, all the classes of Ebikes are largely indistinguishable – again, how would only class 1 Ebike use be policed and enforced, it would be impossible. From local studies, it seems 70 % of Helena's trails are used by hikers, families, slow-users, those that want to enjoy wildlife, contemplative, peaceful areas outside of the city. The public should be educated on the impacts of Ebike use on city one-track trails.

Noreen Friestadt – She helped pass an Open Space bond in 1995 to preserve more than just Mount Helena city park. It was to recognize **conservation first** and recreation second. Noreen feels the Ebike use is not appropriate on single-track trails, she has seen the damage that increased use, mountain bike use and now Ebike impacts.

Noreen sees there is great interest for Ebike use a commuter option, but not on Helena's non-motorized trails.

Dr. Gregory Thomas: He asks if 1. Has any municipality done an environmental impact study on Ebike and Mountain bike use? 2. If Lithium batteries are banned, will we be banning smart phones as well? Dr. G would like to see more information on Ebikes potentially burning on trail systems.

Meg Bishop: Cities are exempt from conducting EISs (Environmental Impact Statements). Meg said she will look into various resources that discuss lithium batteries and the potential for wildfires.

Randy Heska – District #1 - Randy says he is 63 yrs.old and the use of a class I Ebike helps him to still be able to ride the trails. Randy says it is not a motor, but pedal assist\* He feels the city of Helena would be discriminating against the elderly who still want to utilize the trails with ebikes. How will ebike use be enforced?

(\*A **Class 1 eBike**, or low-speed pedal-assisted electric bicycles, is equipped with a **motor** that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and that stops providing assistance when the bicycle reaches 20 mph.)

Steve Paulhemos – Steve Agrees with the January 2020 letter written by Bruce Newell. Steve says the letter stated that Ebikes are not impactful to trails. Steve would like to arrange for an Ebike ride for the public.

Lannie (and Bergetta) Hubbard – They are both over 60 yrs. of age, have lived at the base of Mt. Helena for 30 + years, and enjoy now riding their E-Bikes. The Bikes let them continue getting out of doors. Lannie thinks the City needs to establish a common sense policy for multi-users on trails. Much of the degradation one sees on the trails is due to more use by many people, not from bikes or E-Bikes. Lannie suggests we read an article produced by IMBA (International Mountain Biking Association) that suggests E-Bikes have had relatively low impact on trails.

Dan Barry –Owner of Great Divide Cyclery, he employs 12 people and Mountain biking is near and dear to his heart, and is his livelihood. He is NOT in favor of allowing Class 2 &3 EBikes and motorcycles on trails. The batteries in the Bikes he sells are top notch with no history of fires. Twenty (20) mph is the top speed for Class 1 Ebikes – it is an assist vehicle (?). The Class 1 Ebikes are light weight and not that much different from regular bikes.

Joan Miles – District #2 – She is astounded at the number of people who, on this zoom, have admitted to riding their motorized bikes on our trails, which is a direct violation of regulation that states no motorized bikes allowed. Joan says she does understand that the Class 1 Ebike is more of a minimalist bike, but it is still motorized and could help allow more and more motorized vehicles on our trails. How and who would police the policy of Classes of Ebikes. She mentions a bill currently in the legislature HB326 that would allow 3 wheelers on our fragile trails, putting them in the same class as a Class 1

Ebike. If Helena allows Ebikes on their trails, it would be the ONLY Montana municipality that does so. She supports the recommendation.

Bill Lombardi – He supports having Ebikes on trails. He would like to see some sort of environmental assessment done showing what degradation is happening. It is more fair to have a comprehensive study done. There needs to be respect for all users on the trail system. He hopes there is a fair discussion on this subject moving forward.

Jim Barnes - 510 Leslie – He owns Big Sky Cyclery – Jim feels mountain bikes are no different than Class 1 Ebikes. Class 1 Ebikes cannot spin their hind wheels making more of an impact. Most Ebikes he has sold have been to the elderly who had mountain bikes and now want to continue to ride in the mountains by using an Ebike. He feels there are some people who want to preserve the South Hills as “wilderness”. He does not support the Ebike recommendation. He too, would be glad to conduct a ride and loan out Ebikes to persons who wish to experience them.

Angie Leprohon and David Nimick – 830 Rhode Island. Some of the Rodney Ridge Trail crosses their property. They have seen a huge increase in trail use in the past 5 years. They have a trail camera that films the people using the trail. They have seen many conflicts. Bikers are supposed to yield to hikers, but this is rarely seen. Angie and David are older now and yes they cannot mountain bike as they used to but maybe it is time to step back from that. They can certainly still hike though and would like to see a trail etiquette plan more enforced and in place. Some of these trails cross through BLM, FS, City and Private Properties, so a definitive plan needs to be in place.

Tony Jewett – Diehl Dr. District #2 – He is now 70 yrs. old and hikes the Helena trails two times a day for nearly 40 years. He is no longer able to get to places that he used to, but doesn't have the expectation that he has the right to return to those places with a motorized vehicle. When we age, we need to adjust. The fire danger with lithium batteries is real. Federal Aviation Administration has hundreds of pages of files in regards to battery fires. The Battery in an Ebike is 80 times more powerful than one in a cell phone and water will not extinguish the fire – you need a special extinguisher to deal with a battery fire. All across Western States, most municipalities have banned Ebikes on single track natural trails. Tony does realize that Ebikes are a great commuter device for in town transportation. He has seen great conflict on the trails around Helena. He supports a detailed trail etiquette program. He also supports the recommendation as written.

Bill Callaway – He was injured in a car accident and was prescribed an Ebike. He feels that a town ride is not the same a trail ride.

Nick Soloway – Because of back surgery, he was not able to continue to hike, so he changed to using an Ebike. He feels Ebikes are not like other motorized bikes. He says Helena promotes itself as a Mountain bike destination. Nick doesn't feel bikes and Ebikes create more environmental impacts, the idea that many more people are using the trails is what is creating the impacts. Nick wants to “expand” his play area and Ebikes allow people to explore and better enjoy the countryside.

Loreen Skinner – 59 Cloverview – She is a registered nurse and feels this conversation is preventing people from exercising. Loreen says she has health issues that prevent her from driving, so she can only get around, and to and from work on an Ebike. She is glad she has the ability to use one.

Mary Hepka – She is Dan Barry’s wife – she co-owns the Great Divide Bicycle Shop. She is in support of allowing Ebike use on trails.

### **Comments on Ebike Recommendation from HCC Members**

Tom Woodgerd – HCC District Rep. #4 – Toms owns both a mountain bike and an Ebike. He and his wife rode extensively last summer in Glacier Park, the Hiawatha Trail and around Boise, ID. He feels there is not too much difference between pedal assist Ebikes and Mountain Bikes. Tom feels the conflicts occur when bike riders head downhill and the rear wheel slides around corners creating impact. He appreciates the comments and the number of people weighing in on the Ebike issue. Tom thinks Helena should take a look at how Boise accommodated Ebike use. Tom feels there should be a balanced approach to come to a decision about Ebike use. Tom thinks the recommendation should be tabled until the HCC has more facts and more research is done.

Mike Rooney: HCC District Rep. #2 – Mike needs clarity on how, we as a council, came to this decision on this recommendation. It seems to him, the majority of people are against it.

Dylan Klapmeir responds on process – Anyone, or any Neighborhood district can draft a recommendation for HCC to consider. This recommendation is a DRAFT recommendation. The HCC as a body can then endorse, table, reject or amend the recommendation.

Mike Rooney responds: he prefers the recommendation be tabled.

TJ Lehman – HCC Rep. District #5 – Also, HCC Rep. on HOLMAC – He has attended two meetings with the Parks Dept. where they are discussing Ebike use and comparing similar cities’ responses. TJ feels this recommendation is premature to vote on. We need time to communicate with our constituents. He echos that the recommendation seems one-sided – we need to get more information. TJ wants the Ebike recommendation tabled.

Meg Bishop – HCC District #2 Rep - She takes acception that the proposal is one-sided. Meg re-iterates that ALL Ebikes are power driven vehicles that have a motor. The proposal was based on this premise (as were studies from the Forest Service, City Ordinances) that Ebikes are motorized vehicles. The interjurisdictional nature of our trail system has to be taken into consideration before allowing Ebikes to go everywhere.

Tim Chisman – HCC Rep. District # 1 – Tim states that he appreciates Meg’s Ebike proposal. It seems non-motorized use has already been established. While Ebike use is still in its early stages, Tim feels we need a bigger public forum before the HCC before we make a recommendation. He thinks we should table the recommendation for now.

Margaret Strachan – HCC Rep district #3 – Margaret feels that more information is needed , perhaps an Environment Assesment before this recommendation can move forward. Also, noise on the trails was not considered. Different trails should have different designations – all trails and all users are different. Margaret states she is 85 and still uses the trails as a hiker. She does not care for Ebikes especially on single track trails.

Sumner Sharpe – HCC Rep District #3 - He is not saying no to EBikes, he feels they have a great purpose for commuting, use on paved trails and on trails for motorized use. Sumner feels there definitely needs to be a strict etiquette program. Policing Class 1 Ebikes vs. Class 2 and 3 will be hugely problematic.

Ben Kuiper – HCC Rep District #2 - Ben has a procedural question: if this recommendation is tabled, can it be brought back at a later date? Dylan Klapmeier responds it can be tabled indefinitely or brought back at a later date.

Bob Habeck – HCC Rep. District #7 – Bob is concerned about process and procedures, he is concerned that HCC is getting ahead of the Parks Department. According to TJ who represents HCC on HOLMAC, he feels the Parks Dept. will have a recommendation ready by this fall. Bob thinks we may need more citizen dialogue and perhaps HCC should wait to see what the Parks Dept. brings to the table and HCC can coordinate with them and better establish our role. Bob feels the recommendation should be tabled for now.

Meg Bishop – HCC District #2 Rep. – Meg thinks this has been a great discussion. She would like to see the survey that the Parks Dept. may be putting out to the public. Meg feels the public saying “I like my Ebike” is not a good answer to potential questions being asked. The public needs to be better educated on the types of Ebikes, impacts of Ebikes ( to both trail users and the trail itself),be provided with more data, Environmental Analysis etc. and only then can they make an informed decision/ reply about Ebikes.

**Motion:** Denise Roth Barber makes a motion to table this recommendation. Meg Bishop seconds the motion. A voice vote was taken. None were opposed. There was one (1) abstention. The Ebike recommendation is tabled.

Denis Roth-Barber suggests that someone from the Parks Department come to an HCC meeting and discuss Ebike use on Helena Trails. HCC Districts can compose their own recommendations and bring them to the entire HCC, or could work with District #2 members who have been working on the Ebike recommendation – Dylan Klapmeier agrees.

### **Officer Reports:**

Budget Committee – Nancy Perry – The committee is getting ready to write the 2022 Budget recommendation to the city. The Finance department is busy working within each Fund and each department affiliated with each Fund to establish budget needs.

The HCC Budget Committee is identifying topics and issues to address in May. The survey you just completed with your list of top 5 topics helped give the committee some input. Sumner Sharpe suggests we listen and pick up new ideas/ issues/ topics by listening in on Commission meetings, reading/watching the news etc. Sumner has given great ideas on how to configure the report.

## **Committee Updates**

Helena Public Art Committee: Meeting went long – will report during March meeting.

Civic Center Board – John Andrew – Two members of the Temporary Advisory Board put together a document that outlines the purpose/composition of the new Advisory Board. The document also speaks to the structure of the Civic Center. The roles and responsibilities of the new board was also discussed. An RFP with priorities should be ready by April 30<sup>th</sup>.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Tom Woodgerd – Scott Randall hired to conduct a study of 5 point intersections (malfunction junctions). It was recommended to install round-a-bouts.

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth-Barber- The City Commission voted in favor of the Waste Reduction Recommendation – to reduce waste by 50% by 2050 and develop a strategic plan to jump start this. Since HCC approved the recommendation, she hopes there will be consideration in the HCC Budget recommendation.

Dylan Klapmeier – Reminder that HCC members are elected every 2 years. You must file a form (needs to be notarized) with the election department to get your name on the ballot. **Filing opens 4/22 and closes 6/21.** You can get the form via email from Peggy, or at the elections office (the office is on the first floor of the City/County Bldg. and is open). Please review the HCC's Bylaws, Charter and Purpose & Guiding Principles – you can view these documents in your packet or on our webpage:  
<https://www.helenacitizenscouncil.com/about-us/member-information>

Peggy Benkelman reminds HCC members to sign up to attend Commission Meetings.

Sumner Sharpe – mentions there will be a special HCC Budget Committee Meeting with all HCC members to approve the HCC's Budget recommendations. It will be early in May – maybe around May 10<sup>th</sup>.

If HCC members have topics you would like to have addressed in the budget recommendation, please contact Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, or Sumner Sharpe.

**Meeting was Adjourned at 9:19PM**

**Next Meeting is March 24th<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm via Zoom**