



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
May 13th, 2021 7:00pm
Via Zoom

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

Attendance: Pat Marron, John Andrew, Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strachan, Colleen Murphy, Dylan Klapmeier, TJ Lehman, Steve Allen, Jamie Dwyer, Susan Steffens, Peggy Benkelman(coordinator)

Excused: Tim Chisman, Mike Rooney, Gary Dalton, Tom Woodgerd, Samson Boyd, David Beach, Ryan Schwochert, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet, Joseph Lehman, Jason Welnel, Ben Kennedy, Bob Habeck.

Guests: Dr. G.

A Quorum was established

Approval of April 2021 Minutes

Chair Dylan Klapmeier asks if there are any changes or corrections to the minutes for April 2021. None mentioned. Chair states minutes stand approved.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Old Business

Discussion of Secretary Vacancy – Dylan K. asks if there are any nominations from the floor for this position? No nominations, so Chair Dylan K. appoints John Andrew as the HCC Secretary and a member of the HCC Executive Committee. John A. accepts.

HCC Budget Discussion:

Nancy Perry begins by thanking everyone who helped her write the report. Thanks to Peggy Benkelman for her behind the scenes help with calendars, meetings and emails. Thanks to: TJ Lehman for Trails and Open Lands information, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert and TJ Lehman for information regarding the Golf Course and Muni's Restaurant, John Andrew for Capital Transit and Civic Center input, Chelly Hasquet and Peggy Benkelman for Public Arts, Diana Hammer for Water information, Bob Habeck regarding Fire Mitigation, Joe Lehman for Road Projects, Jamie Dwyer for Sewer/Sewer payback program and Denise Roth-Barber for Recycle and Solid Waste updates.

Nancy P. shows the HCC Budget Document. It has three parts.

1. Summary of Review and Recommendation. This part was written by Sumner Sharpe. It summarizes what is to come in the document. Nancy P. will add what the HCC duties are as seen in the City Charter. Dylan K. will add a paragraph about the City's Organizational Chart.

2. Specific Issues to Consider

- a. Speaks to how the city took a beating financially because of COVID
- b. Lack of Tourism hurt revenues
- c. Helena Airport Authority – how they owe the city payments/fees in the amount of \$250K. This issue is confusing because there are few documents outlining the agreements the airport has with the city.
- d. Recreation Facilities – more losses due to COVID, such as at the Golf Course and Civic Center.

Road Maintenance – Sumner Sharpe says many of the projects have been on the list for 10 plus years. Neighborhood streets are sadly missing updates/improvements. The city keeps using chip & seal repair, but this is not enough. Some of the streets are in such disrepair and need to be re-built. There needs to be a program developed to gain funds for neighborhood street repair. A local gas tax fund could finance bonds for neighborhood streets.

Upper and Lower DeFord Trail – The HCC has given its recommendation to the Commission about making the trail ADA accessible. The city does have a working group considering the HCC recommendation. The HCC would like to see our recommendation come to fruition.

Capital City Transit – The Commission and the City has heard the HCC's recommendation regarding this issue. The city wonders where the money will come from. The HCC feels strongly that the city should find the money and make the necessary updates so the bus system can become more easily used and self-sustaining.

Helena Regional Sports Association – The association wants to build a big facility in the Helena area and the City has agreed to float the bond to do so. The only problem is location. Originally, it was to be near the YMCA. Pat Marron states this location is problematic in that it is on an old 60 year landfill, the ground is constantly moving and settling as well as producing methane gas. Parking is also a huge issue at that location.

3.Recommendations by Fund # - Discussion Specifics

Fund #211 Civic Center – The steering Committee appointed by the City voted to have a non-profit run the Civic Center similar to both the Myrna Loy and Grandstreet Theatre. John prefers a hybrid model of non-profit management where the city would still own and maintain the building, while a non-profit group would handle programming and have the extra ability to raise money via donations, grants etc. Air Conditioning is still at the top of the to-do list, so the Civic Center can remain open during the summer months and maximize its usage.

Fund #521 – Water Fund – The current water supply may not be able to supply water to everyone should city limits expand. Sumner Sharpe says lack of adequate sewers, contamination of wells could be huge future problems for the city. Sumner S. thinks the city should have a regional system and form a regional water district as well. Diana Hammer says we have a real opportunity to support the Water Master Plan of the city of Helena. It does look towards the needs of the future and consider the larger Helena area. Diana also says that the city needs to perfect its groundwater rights or

Helena may be at risk of losing them. Groundwater is another good source of potable water. There is a tripod of water sources for Helena: Ten Mile Creek, Missouri River and Groundwater. Diana H. feels more money should be put into the Water fund and that the city should raise its water rates. Diana H. uses Bozeman's example of educating its public and not using the word annexation, it tends to make people nervous. Sumner S. states that other cities have extended their water systems beyond city boundaries and then got caught in the future and were not able to collect funds to support the water services, so Helena needs to be careful. Diana H. feels confident that the Helena Water Master Plan will do a good job of taking into consideration future expansion and demographics. Sumner reiterates there should be a City/County regional water district.

Fund #531 – Wastewater Fund - The HCC supports the Waste Water master plan.

Fund #522,532 - Water/Sewer Service Lines- The loan program with 0% interest free loan for 10 years has been a success as evidenced in the amount being borrowed/utilized.

Fund # 542,543,546 - Solid Waste, Fund #547 – Recycling – HCC is happy with what was written by Denise Roth-Barber. It is interesting to note that the city doesn't make any money from recycling. It would be great if plastics and glass could be taken to the Transfer Station.

Fund #551 – Parking- During pandemic, the City did re-instate parking fees by December of 2020. Parking is running low in its Reserve Balance due to lost revenue because of COVID.

Sumner Sharpe mentions keeping a good Reserve Balance is important. Even before COVID, reserves were discussed in relation to budget. Sumner feels a longer strategic plan should be in place regarding both reserves and the General Fund.

Fund #563 - Bill Roberts Golf Course and Muni's Restaurant – The Golf Course is running a negative Reserve Balance. The City Manager said a possible way to revive this would be to separate the fund into 3 funds; Golf Course, Pro Shop and Muni's Restaurant. It seems the Golf Course expenses are under control, but Muni's is struggling due to a loan from two years ago. This recommendation is delayed – waiting to hear what the Commission is going to say about it. Sumner Sharpe says revenue bonds were sold to build Muni's and the restaurant is having trouble paying on the principal.

Fund #233 - Public Arts Project – Title should be changed to Helena Public Arts Committee to reflect its name HPAC. HCC members agree that they support HPAC.

Fund #237 - Urban Forestry Fund – Thanks to Bob Habeck for writing this. Landowner education is important concerning wildfire. Tri-County Fire Safe is/was going door to door helping homeowners fire proof their property. City of Helena needs to be prepared to fight possible wildfires that may move into the city. Helena now has a wildland fire truck.

Pat Marron says there are actually two separate funds: 1. Urban Forestry which takes care of trees on boulevards (Emerald Ash Borer problem) and 2. Open Space which takes care of weed control and more wildland areas.

Fund #238 - Loan Repayment Fund – This is a fund that records loans and keeps track of interest and principle. Ben Kuiper researched the Artisan Fund that took out a loan around 2005 and then stopped making payments. After asking Finance Director Sheila Danielson about it, she said the loan was re-negotiated and payments were resumed in 2020.

Renewable Energy Loans – City of Helena started these loans at 0% for 10 years. Ben K. recommends there be a low interest rate charged 1-2% to cover the annual rate of inflation in Montana. The sewer loans are funded by Helena residents' utility bills, while the Solar revolving loan program is paid on the individuals property taxes (per Diana H.).

Diana Hammer strongly disagrees. She wants the loans to stay at 0%. Diana feels the Commission will be adding money to the account as State tax credits for the program are going away. Susan Steffens mentions they utilized the State program – they did get charged a low interest 2-3%, but it was/is a great program.

Fund #260 - Fire Safety Levy Fund -

The HCC wants the City to pursue adding an additional Fire Station.

Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC): - HCC is encouraging the City to pursue these grants from the State FY2022 there are \$20,000 in grants available. This is a nonprofit that can help with economic development projects and may also help with staffing.

Fund #406 - Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Railroad District,

Fund #407 – TIF Downtown District -

These monies typically go to economic development opportunities. Sumner Sharpe says he has monitored these funds for several years now and it seems the City still doesn't have a good strategic plan on how to spend these funds. For example using the funds for a performance stage doesn't really promote economic development.

Fund #440 - Capital Improvement Fund – Waiting for more input before making a recommendation.

Fund #450 - Sidewalk Improvements Fund – Two proposals were discussed: 1.

People pay a percentage of the cost to repair the sidewalks around their home 2. City take care of the sidewalks themselves (via a tax program).

Sumner Sharpe said last year the city did repair the sidewalks located around a few schools. Diana Hammer asks if there is a city policy on sidewalk repair/replacement? Are there no more grassy areas between the sidewalk and the street? Colleen Murphy suggests that the Commission along with City, develop a program where every citizen pays into the sidewalk fund equally. Pat Marron says it is expensive when building a new home and you are responsible for building the sidewalk – you never recoup that money. Pat M. also says there is a 5- foot minimum for sidewalks and that many developers are bypassing having the grassy area between the sidewalk and the street. This creates a problem for homeowners when snowplows clear the roads and pile it onto your sidewalk, which you then have to remove to keep the sidewalk cleared. Susan Steffens asks if there are any plans for sidewalks on the Upper Eastside where there

are NO sidewalks at all. Sumner S. comments that when they put sidewalks into areas where there haven't been any, it creates problems with storm water run-off.

ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Federal Funds – Dylan K. is concerned that some of the funds may be used in areas that are ineligible (from Federal Standards). He thinks it is “more bang for your buck” to apply for State Matching grants and receive even more money especially in the areas of water and health. Sumner Sharpe would like to see some money go towards supporting small businesses in downtown, downtown maintenance, better sidewalks, creating more activities, drawing more people to downtown.

Meeting was Adjourned at 9:02 PM

Next Meeting is May 20th at 7:00pm via Zoom – this meeting will be short and only pertain to budget discussion and vote.