



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)  
**Minutes**  
**August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 7:00-9:00PM**  
**Zoom & In Person Room 326**

**Meeting was called to order by HCC Chair Cole Rosling at 7:03pm**

**Attendance:** John R (JR) Andrew, John Andrew, Patricia Bik, Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry, Nolan Harris, Ben Kuiper, Lowell Chandler, Paige Myers, Emily Mowers, Michael Monaco, Rachel Okapal, Dylan Klapmeier, TJ Lehman, Burt Federman, Cole Rosling, Ryan Schwochert, Steve Allen, Susan Smith, Denise Roth-Barber, Susan Steffens, Chelly Hasquet, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

**Excused:** Joe Lehman, Margaret Strachan, Heidi Friedlander, Bob Habeck, Liz Maida - Gerhart

**Guests:** Dr. Gregory Thomas, Nigel Antony, Chief of Police: Brett Petty, Paul Pacini

**A Quorum was established - yes**

**Approval of July 2022 Minutes –** A motion to approve the minutes was made No changes, objections or abstentions. All in favor. Minutes were approved.

**Public Comment - none**

**Guest Speaker Police Chief Brett Petty –** Chief Petty states he has been in Helena since 2003 and has 19 yrs. of Law Enforcement experience. He continually keeps updated with trainings and national trends. Since he hires humans, he wants to remind us that humans make mistakes. He says the Helena Police are customer-service oriented. Chief Petty then gives an overview of the Police Department: They are budgeted for 53 sworn officers, currently there are at 47, but he just hired 3 new officers. There are: 2 Animal Control Officers, 1.5 Evidence Clerks, 12 Dispatchers (there are 15 allowed) an Operations Mgr., Programs Mgr., IT Public Systems Administrator, 3.5 Clerks with a Supervisor in the Records Division (they oversee the Police, Sheriff, E. Helena, Booking Jackets, Warrant Entries and Sex/violent offenders).

Currently they are down 5 officers due to attrition, retirement and deaths. Corey Bailey, a captain, has 25 years of experience, but many of the current officers have only 0-5 years experience, but they constantly attending trainings. The newly hired police officers go through interviews, testing and 3 months attending the Law Enforcement Academy followed by 14 weeks of field training. It is 7-8 months before an officer can respond to calls on his own. During the 14 weeks of field training, the 4<sup>th</sup> phase is termed "solo" but the officer is with a trainer who acts like he isn't really there and very technically grades the new officer. Police testing occurs 3 times per year and an October testing is quickly approaching.

Currently the Police Department has about 84 employees through General Funding. The Records and Dispatch Departments are funded through the public safety mill levy and taxes put on cell phones.

**Ben Kuiper – HCC District #2 asks** - Are wages – benefits competitive? Chief Petty says yes, they are on par with the big 7 cities throughout Montana.

**Nolan Harris – HCC District #2 asks** – Is there any reason an officer would be in the field without any training? Chief Petty says no. A sworn officer always has at least 7-8 months of training before they are out on the street. Lateral officer applicants have training as well and must attend

the 14-week training. The Sheriff program is similar in its training requirements. Some states have even longer training requirements, for example CA training is 6 months.

Nolan H. asks if MT has many transfers from out of state? Chief Petty says some are from FLA, CA, TN.

Paige Myers – HCC District #3 asks – Do more experienced officers still receive training? Chief Petty responds that yes, they do. MT state law requires that they have 20 hrs. every two years and well has yearly trainings on specific topics e.g. communication training (verbal judo), active shooter. Accountability of older officers is done by training officers.

Susan Smith – HCC District #6 – asks if physical fitness is a problem for officers. Chief Petty says all officers have to pass the Montana Physical Abilities Test (MPAT), they also have a doctor's physical, and drug test. To help encourage officers to stay in shape, they must take the MPAT once per year and if they complete it quickly. They may get comp time as a reward. Chief Petty mentions they are addressing mental health with officers as well. They will offer incentives there too.

Cole Rosling – HCC District #5 asks if there is a rise in crime in Helena? Chief Petty says there was a dip in crime during the pandemic and there had not been a homicide in Helena for over a year, until July 2022. Chief gives some stats for years 2020-2021: there were 54,000 calls for service. The most common calls were for accidents, animal control, disorderly conduct, domestic assaults, trespass and welfare checks. Chief Petty did note that mental health calls are on the rise – they are up 420 per year. If a person is a threat to themselves or society, they are referred to the hospital and only a physician can release them. Chief Petty mentions that officers receive Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) yearly.

Susan Smith – HCC District #6 – states that she has heard from her constituents about an increase in crime in parks and bullying issues with children. Chief Petty says that crime is not just limited to park areas. He says actually the crime rate at Skate Park and Memorial Park is much better in the last 5 years. Petty liked the officers on bicycles – he says their presence really makes a difference.

Nolan Harris – HCC District #2 says: the HCC will be canvassing their neighborhoods for input and we could be spokespersons for the Police Department. Anything our HCC members should mention? Chief Petty says yes: "If you see something, say something". Police prefer to get information or be at the scene of a crime first before there is social media or too much public comment. The public should lock their homes and their cars. The non-emergent police hotline is 406-442-3233.

Paul Pacini – member of the Helena Public – Asks about loud mufflers/decibel noise of cars out on the street. Chief Petty mentions that State Code specifically addresses this issue and it is against code. Because officers are so busy, they probably won't quickly respond to a nuisance call such as this, but as a citizen, it is best to get the make and model of the car along with the license plate and an officer can issue a citation that way.

### **Proposed Updated Recommendation for Passenger Train Through Helena – Paul Pacini**

Paul P. shows audience the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) Join the Movement brochure. He then asks that we visualize how great it would be to ride the train, how a passenger train would increase state and citywide income and citizens would gain another mode of transportation, all while saving 24% of their fuel expense. A passenger train really is a win win for Helena, L&C County and the State of MT. Eighteen (18) of the 24 counties along this southern train route in Montana have already signed on to the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority. In 2016, the HCC produced a formal recommendation to the City of Helena Commissioners stating they feel it is important to support and have rail service through Helena. L&C County needs to join the BSRA to have a seat on the board. There is no cost to join. Paul is asking the HCC to re-affirm its 2016 recommendation (passed by the City Commission in 2017) and support having passenger rail service through Helena. Members of HCC can also write to their County Commissioners stating, on a personal level, that they support the passenger rail service.

Paul P. states how efficient train travel is: one train can replace 280 freight trucks, one train can haul passengers replacing 16 lanes of car traffic and only 1% of greenhouse gas is emitted by a train.

**Chairman Rosling opens the floor for discussion:**

John E. Andrew asks if we should have an HCC rep on the RXR TIF committee? Susan Steffens has been working on the Passenger Train Recommendation so, as an HCC member can bring it forward as an official HCC recommendation.

Paul Pacini says it will take a majority vote of 3 County Commissioners to join the Big Sky Passenger Rail authority (BSPRA). One county commissioner says why join if the tracks come here anyway? Paul P. feels like this is free loading and Helena may lose out on receiving Federal & State funding if they don't join. There are billions of Federal dollars available to Amtrak right now, and Paul P and many others would like to see Helena be able to participate in these grants.

Dylan Klapmeier asks if there is a financial obligation to join BSPRA? Paul P. says there is no monetary obligation but you do get to be a part of appointing an overseer.

Paul P. says a commissioner's hesitation to join may be because it could raise County taxes slightly, but this would be offset by the money the train would bring to the community. Having the passenger train is like having another interstate roadway exchange. The train would bring huge social and economic benefit to the area. 30% of Americans don't drive and a train would promote more travel, more shopping, more family visitation and easier access to healthcare. Paul P. mentions there was a statewide BSPRA meeting in Billings with Andre Kamershen from the Ukraine (a country with one of the largest Passenger rail systems in the world). Their rail system has proven to be the backbone of security to get people quickly moving to safety. That could be true of Montana as well, especially in cases of fire, earthquakes, flooding etc.

Susan Smith HCC District #6 asks if there has been a cost analysis done on this issue? Is there a link online?

She is concerned about her Federal taxes going up. Paul P. says there is already Federal money set aside for Passenger Rail service. A link to information was provided in the chat:

[https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A\\_youtu.be\\_GmkqqODNiFE&d=DwIFAg&c=euGZstcaTDIlvimEN8b7jXrwqOf-v5A\\_CdpqnVfiiMM&r=aFWU\\_hrhV6xL2X2-flA3FA&m=qJHOYzwFbaUi7j6Sq7rnFv1OdkLrAm56i4aY5EQhcZ0&s=7gM9B0WTsceuHlmlKcEW2PSoFdbRVOSaDpwBFM-SrGo&e=](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_youtu.be_GmkqqODNiFE&d=DwIFAg&c=euGZstcaTDIlvimEN8b7jXrwqOf-v5A_CdpqnVfiiMM&r=aFWU_hrhV6xL2X2-flA3FA&m=qJHOYzwFbaUi7j6Sq7rnFv1OdkLrAm56i4aY5EQhcZ0&s=7gM9B0WTsceuHlmlKcEW2PSoFdbRVOSaDpwBFM-SrGo&e=)

<https://missoulacurrent.com/passenger-rail-restoration/>

Ben Kuiper HCC District #2 would like to see the older recommendation re-written. Cole Rosling HCC District #5 agrees with this view.

Paul Pacini says that Mayor Collins has reached out to the County Commissioners encouraging them to approve membership in the BSPRA.

Lowell Chandler HCC District #3 thinks it is incumbent upon Helena as the State Capitol, that the rail service is approved. This is where the state does its business and it would be a great source of travel for its citizens. Lowell would support a motion today.

Susan Steffens HCC District #7 would like to make a motion today to vote Paige Myers HCC District #3 likes this idea and seconds the motion.

Nolan Harris HCC District #2 asks if there are any policy changes since the last recommendation submitted in 2016 and approved by the Commission in 2017? Paul P. says there has been a much bigger push to get the BSPRA passed.

**Chair Rosling asks if there are any other questions, issues or opposing views** – none expressed.

**Susan Steffens makes a motion to vote on the Passenger rail recommendation as previously written with a change of date on it. Paige Myers seconds the motion.**

Peggy Benkelman calls out names and takes a verbal vote from all present at the meeting – Steve Allen’s mic not working, so he votes in the chat yes.

**Final vote is 13 yes, 9 no. Motion passes.**

Cole Rosling asks that Susan Steffens gets the recommendation re-formatted with no language change, but with a new date, he will sign it and it can get forwarded on to the Commission.

Lowell Chandler gives a quick update on the Jefferson School area flashing light HCC recommendation. He says new speed limit signs at 15MPH have been installed, but no flashing lights yet.

Dylan Klapmeier gives an update from the Bylaws Update Committee. They are ready for discussion possibly at the September full board meeting with official voting on the changes to be in October. All members have received them, and he asks that they please review them. Peggy Benkelman says she will resend them as well.

### **Reports of Officers, Boards, & Standing Committees**

Officer Reports:

Chair- Cole Rosling – Cole reminds members to please send him their ideas for future meeting topics.

Vice-Chair- Dylan Klapmeier – Dylan has heard from members that they would like to hear about Air BnB regulations within the city.

Treasurer-Nolan Harris – no new updates, reimbursement for \$46 was sent to the Finance Dept. for outreach from District #1

Secretary – Diana Hammer – no new reports

### **Commission Attendees’ Reports – One Minute**

**8/3 Paige Myers:** CCB continuance is still being considered, new trees along the golf course were planted and donated by Growing Friends, New Fire restriction put in place for rubbish burning, University x Floweree intersection concerns about speeding, Warren Traffic Flow under consideration. The Comprehensive Community Plan was put into place. It entails maintaining public properties, safety, creating standards for projects.

**8/8 Burt Federman** – There was a half-hour presentation on future water rights. The Commission decided not to raise water rates. Burt stated he presented several issues/recommendations from the HCC to the Commission, but just got blank stares.

**8/17 John E. Andrew** – The Community Development Zoning Commission spoke more about the HCC Daycare Recommendation. Lowell Chandler HCC District #3 also gave a presentation about it. The Parks department gave a Power Point on money needed. Amanda Opitz gave an ARPA fund update. The HVAC update (Air Conditioning) was approved for the Civic Center.

**8/22 Emily Mowers** - New Parks director was introduced – **Doug Smith** – he will begin work on Sept. 19<sup>th</sup>. Some new building codes were approved. Zoning discussed for St. Andrews school as they were building outdoor non-conforming classrooms. A new special lighting district was discussed but residents in the area were concerned about cost to them.

**Coordinator Report** – Peggy Benkelman – Office is all packed up and now I work completely remotely. I am always available to meet though if you would arrange a time. There will be a new permanent display about HCC in the lobby of the City/County Building. I will be refreshing it

weekly. I will still be able to conduct work from room 320 – I just have to arrange the time in advance. Feel free to phone me on my work phone 406-594-0010.

### **Committee Updates:**

Outreach – Emily Mowers –Vests that we ordered are still delayed. The Committee is working on new updated door hangers. There is a window display on corner of 6<sup>th</sup> x Last Chance Gulch.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – August meeting was cancelled due to no quorum.

Civic Center – John Andrew – John met with interim city manager Tim Burton, and Tim feels that having a Civic Center Committee is important and he will encourage a vote within the Commission.

HPAC – The August meeting was cancelled as there was no quorum.

Non-Motorized Travel – Lowell Chandler – Lowell was attending an Admin Commission meeting, so was not able to attend the Non-Motorized Travel meeting.

Transp. Coordinating Committee –Joe Lehman – excused, so no update

Water Quality – Diana Hammer – The committee took a tour of Lake Helena regarding erosion protection. They showed how the use of willows protects banks.

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth Barber – Denise mentioned the Watershed Festival from 9-1:00PM in Women's Park August 27<sup>th</sup>.

Library Board – Paige Myers – The library is still in full force utilizing their reciprocal book borrowing program. The Big Read is happening again this year with a free give away of the book *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* by Lisa See with an author signing at the Civic Center Tuesday October 4<sup>th</sup> at 7:00PM free and open to the public. The L&C Library is still searching for an East Helena location.

Golf – Ryan Schwochert – there have been 5-6 candidates that applied to be line cooks at Muni's restaurant on the Golf Course. Golf Course participation numbers are up this year. There will need to be improvements to irrigation in the next couple of years.

Fire Department – Liz Gerhart – Liz was not present at the HCC meeting. Not sure if the Fire Department meetings have begun.

Parks Department – Ben Kuiper – although this position is not a voting position, Ben will keep the HCC updated.

### **New Business** – Specific District Issues/Concerns/Ideas

Effects and Future Effects of Air BnB's on neighborhood homes

Outreach Committee on specific District issues & concerns

Dr. Gregory Thomas – member of the public, but also a member of the Big Sky Rail Authority (BSPRA) verifies that there will be NO tax increases should Helena join the BSRA. Amtrak does not operate this way. Commissioner Hunthausen was at the Passenger Rail summit in Billings and he very much supports joining BSPRA. Dr. G feels it is important for Helena to join BSPRA so we have more of a voice on train schedules etc. Right now, Dr. G is our voice. For more detailed information, please contact him at [drq@roostech.com](mailto:drq@roostech.com) or 406-417-0580.

Paige Myers makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, Lowell Chandler seconds

### **Adjourn 9:00PM**

**Next Meeting September 28th on Zoom and in person Room 326**