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May 21, 2021

TO: The Helena City Commission

FROM: The Helena Citizens' Council

RE: Helena Citizens' Council Review and Recommendations Regarding the Fiscal Year
2022 Revised Preliminary City Budget

Summary of Review and Recommendations

The Helena City Charter calls for a citizens' council, saying "There shall be seven (7) Neighborhood Councils, collectively comprising a Helena Citizens' Council. Operating independently from the city commission or city officials, the Helena Citizens' Council shall review and recommend actions relating to the annual budget, and make recommendations relating to future development of the city." Thus, this document.

The City Charter states that the Helena Citizens' Council (HCC) operates independently from the Commission. It makes sense for the HCC to be independently placed by the Municipal Judge in the city organizational chart with a line connecting the HCC to the Commission as we make recommendations to them. The HCC would also like clarification on where the other city advisory boards fit within the city organization chart. They have historically been important public stakeholders to the city government. The HCC recommends against structural changes to the HCC budget or Coordinator position this budget cycle but remains open to conversations about structural changes in future fiscal years. Overall, the HCC recommends a long-term future analysis of all funds (Enterprise, Special Revenue and General) including consideration of the continuing economic impacts of COVID-19 as well as other funding sources. Project and operational needs should be reviewed and revenue sources identified that will be needed to retain or attain financial stability in each fund.

Steps the City might propose to respond to future funding needs due to anticipated revenue shifts could include: cutting costs, increasing revenues, drawing down reserves (some of which have been on the decline), establishing minimum guidelines for reserves for each fund as these needs vary, etc. This analysis would provide an overview of steps the City might take in the future to manage each of these funds. Continued reliance on tax and fee increases and drawing from the General Fund will not always be possible. Fund reserves and other responses need to be looked at more closely.

The HCC encourages the City, led by the City Manager and Finance Department, to engage in strategic planning regarding the city budget, in collaboration with the City Commission,

department heads, City Advisory committees, the public, and consultation with Lewis and Clark County. Long-term fiscal sustainability for the City is dependent on a cohesive, strategic plan with input and understanding by all of the above interested parties to support a prosperous city for residents and to provide high-quality services for residential neighborhoods as well as for specific districts.

Some things to consider:

1. The City of Helena has made every effort to continue to function throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly by using on-line meetings, mandating masks in the City-County building, and working remotely by email or phone to provide non-essential services to the public. Some facilities, closed at the beginning of the fiscal year, are back open, with social distancing at parks and open spaces, food trucks, the Civic Center, the Farmers' Market, Capital Transit, and the Bill Roberts Golf Course and Muni's restaurant. Helena's budget will reflect the effects of this pandemic for a while.
2. Reduced tourism in FY2021 means reduced city bed tax revenues. The Canadian border has been closed to incoming tourists since March 21, 2020. American tourism was similarly reduced. The Helena Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)/Helena Tourism Alliance lost 50% in revenue (\$265,000) compared to 2019. The Helena Visitor Center was not open for the roughly 400 visitors/month at Reeder's Alley nor the additional visitors normally visiting at the Helena Chamber/Convention and Visitor Bureau. Average yearly hotel occupancy rates for Helena range around 65%; for 2020 that was closer to 35%, and at one point sank to 3%.
3. The relationship between the Helena Airport Authority and the City of Helena is not well documented. Assessments and leases, including leases of airport facilities held by third parties are, in some cases, two years delinquent. Currently the Airport Authority owes the City as much as \$344,000. Relative to the size of Helena's budget, this is a sizeable sum. The City Manager vows to untangle those relationships and get the City the money owed it. HCC is concerned that so much money has been 'left on the table' as a result of past inadequate recordkeeping. We are grateful to the City Manager for persevering in clearing up this particular issue and urge the City to look for other instances where the City is owed money.
4. Revenue from City recreation facilities continues to suffer due to closures or operating at limited capacity. In FY2021, the swimming pool operated at limited capacity with reduced swim lessons, suffering revenue losses of ~\$15,000. The Memorial Park skating rink was open in a limited capacity with minimal revenue losses. The three small neighborhood rinks were open in FY2021 but do not charge admission and registered no losses. The Civic Center lost \$477,000 in revenues from March 2020 through February 2021, reflecting the 103 cancelled events and the 18 events held at discounted rates (see below). The Bill Roberts Golf Course estimates lost or unrealized revenue of \$200,000 for FY2021. Muni's restaurant closed for two months and estimates lost or unrealized revenue of \$250,000. The smaller recreation venues (tennis, park rentals, food rental spaces) lost ~\$10,000-\$15,000 due to Covid-19.

5. An ongoing annual expense for Helena is road maintenance. Within Helena several entities have financial responsibility for various stretches of roadway, including the Federal Government, the State of Montana, Lewis and Clark County, and the City of Helena. Local neighborhood streets, including collectors as well as local streets, connect neighborhood streets, with major roadways supported by State and Federal agencies. Exceptions include a few private roads running within some residential developments. Helena uses revenues collected through the Streets & Traffic Fund (#201) as well as from other sources such as the City's share of State gas taxes to fund repair of local roads. Street surfaces are given new life with scheduled chip seal applications. However, some of our oldest streets are so worn that chip seal treatment is inadequate; major repairs and even rebuilding streets are needed. These local street conditions are getting worse with added wear and tear as well as impacts on surfaces resulting from a continuing need for replacement of aging water and sewer lines under the streets. In some cases, the continuing chip seal treatments have resulted in impacts to drainage along curbs as the height of curbs relative to the street surface has diminished and access points to under-street infrastructure are well below grade. In some cases, the underlying structure of some local streets was never built to standards and has failed or is failing.

Several years ago, the City undertook a study of street conditions and identified those streets most in need of major repairs or reconstruction. We recommend this study be updated on a regular basis; conditions are getting worse and many of these street conditions do not seem to have been addressed.

The need to address neighborhood streets, now and in the future, deserves consideration in a more strategic and structured long-term continuing manner. It is recommended that a separate neighborhood/local street fund be established to address these current and future needs. For example, this fund could be established with a set aside of a portion of gas tax funds from the State (the state gas tax will be increasing over the next several years and the City should anticipate added revenues from this source), a set aside from the City street fund, or a referral to the voters for a specific continuing funding source for a neighborhood street fund for major repairs or reconstructions. These revenue sources could then be used to pay back revenue bonds for these improvements.

6. On October 28, HCC recommended to the City Commission the conversion of the Upper and Lower DeFord Trail to an ADA compliant trail that could accommodate wheelchairs. If the recommendation is enacted, the Lower DeFord trail will provide an open-space trail to persons with disabilities and/or mobility issues and the Upper DeFord Trail will provide that same population an even more challenging trail to navigate. The trail's total length is approximately 1.5 miles. The goal is to enhance the livability of our community for everyone. Parks & Recreation has assigned HCC's recommendation to the Upper DeFord Working Group for consideration. The working group will study the trail's topography to determine if it can be made ADA compliant. Depending on the study results, they will or will not approve HCC's recommendation to the City. The City

will apply for a federal grant to make improvements on the DeFord and on Davis Street, running parallel to it. Any improvements will take place only after public review.

7. Capital Transit is Helena's public bus system. It has two Red and Blue fixed-route buses and three paratransit buses running in Helena and one deviated fixed-route bus serving the East Helena-East Valley region. Although Capital Transit has maintained service during the pandemic, ridership has fallen approximately 29%, resulting in a loss of \$25,880 and decreases in Federal and State funding during the same period. On April 13, HCC recommended that Capital Transit take a few steps to increase ridership and the visibility of the Capital Transit system. These recommendations include improvements to signage at bus stops and additional stops on residential streets. The Department of Transportation studied our recommendation and explored solutions. They responded that signs bearing route or schedule information would have to be replaced whenever routes or schedules change. The initial signage would cost approximately \$4750. No funding source was identified. Adding additional stops on residential streets would not be a trivial change; no plan to effect this change was offered. HCC recommends that funding for the new signage be identified and further thought be given to adding stops on residential streets.
8. Deer are a common sight in Helena. They are comfortable around people and can become a nuisance. They eat landscaping plants, carry ticks, and cause deer-vehicle collisions. In 2020 the State of Montana authorized Helena's urban wildlife program (UWP) to control the size of the deer herd, allowing up to 250 animals to be culled annually. The Police Department administers the UWP; its budget is part of the overall police budget. However, the UWP was budgeted \$0 in both FY2020 and FY2021. Helena's deer herd has grown and so have the problems it causes. In 2019 there were 31 collisions, 67 complaints, and 11 road hazards caused by deer. In 2020 those totals rose to 47 collisions, 117 complaints, and 15 road hazards caused by deer. We recommend funding be made available to the UWP in FY2022 for purposes of culling the deer herd.
9. In 2006 and again in 2008, studies of the Helena Fire Department (HFD) pointed to the need for a third fire station in the northern part of town. While the station still has not been built, the City has continued to grow, giving our two existing fire stations a larger area of responsibility and increased demands on their services, resulting in longer emergency response times, overlapping calls, increased property loss, delayed medical care, and higher fire insurance rates paid by property owners. With only two fire stations, HFD exceeds the National Fire Protection Agency industry standards for both average fire response times and average EMS response times. We urge the City Commission to make it a priority to improve fire and EMS service in Helena to include: forming a stakeholder task force to review the 2006 and 2008 studies, seek current information from staff including urban/wildland interface service as well as inter-local agreements, identify current needs, recommend improvements and offer funding options to include the establishment of a third fire station on the north end of the city.
10. The Helena Regional; Sports Association (HRSA) is partnering with the YMCA to bring the community a regional sports complex that eventually would include an indoor

swimming pool, a family pool, field sports, court sports, and an early child education center. HRSA incorporated and formed a 501c3, and began collecting grant money and contributions, including a contribution of \$10,000 from the City of Helena. Believing that a public/private partnership would be required to build such a large facility, HRSA hired a nonprofit consultancy firm to do a feasibility study to determine if the greater community of Helena, East Helena, and Northern Jefferson County could generate the philanthropic support necessary to bring the project about. They also asked both the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County to promise to float a public bond in the future. It is early in the campaign, and they anticipate it would take at least two or three years before an appropriate site is identified and construction can begin.

Review and Recommendations by Fund Number

Fund #100-General - The Sun Run is a long-standing community event (first Saturday in October) to raise awareness and funds in support of renewable energy projects. Funds raised previously have been used to purchase and install solar arrays on the Lewis and Clark Public Library, Carroll College, and the new Central Elementary School. Future projects include funding to purchase and install solar panel arrays at the new Bryant and Jim Darcy Elementary Schools.

Recommendation: The HCC recommends the City Commission continue its support for the Sun Run in FY2022 (\$1000).

Fund #100-011-General Government - To continue to support the City's efforts to save money and resources, the City has been a member of Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) for the past few years. ICLEI provides training, systems tracking, and other resources to help Helena improve its energy and resource efficiency (which saves funds). As an additional part of the City's sustainability efforts, a small amount of funding could be used to hold community meetings to raise awareness and promote conservation measures. In support of the implementation of the Waste Reduction Resolution (February 2021), there is \$60,000 in the current budget for a Strategic Plan to identify opportunities for waste reduction in the Helena community. There are certain grants which require matching funds and this budget anticipates applying for such grants to leverage City funds. There is on-going coordination to advance the 100% Clean Electricity Goal through Helena's joint work with Missoula City and County and Bozeman; the budget contains funds in support of this inter-local policy development and coordination.

Recommendation: For the FY2022 budget, the HCC recommends the City Commission continue its ICLEI membership (\$600); sustainability meetings (\$1400), support funding for the Waste Reduction Strategic Plan (\$60,000), support grant matching funds (\$30,000), and inter-local policy development (\$30,000).

Fund #011-1701-Helena Citizens' Council

Recommendation: The HCC Budget Committee has agreed with the Preliminary Budget with some additions. Personnel Services at \$26894 which includes a cost-of-living increase and raise, \$650 for Supplies and Materials, Total Purchased Services at \$4615 which includes increases in other contracted services (\$700 Neighborhood Outreach, \$300 Survey Outreach, \$650 Water Bill insert). Total for Helena Citizens' Council is \$32779.

Fund #211-Civic Center - Because it lacks air conditioning, the Civic Center remains dark all summer. It was closed most of 2020 because of the pandemic. A steering committee was appointed to determine the facility's path forward. After studying many similar facilities in similarly sized cities, they proposed allowing a nonprofit advisory body to lease, operate, and manage the building while the City maintains ownership. The nonprofit could do strategic planning and fund raising in ways that the City cannot, employing tax exemptions, grants, individual donations, partnerships, naming rights, rentals, and sponsorships. However, the

nonprofit could take from five to ten years to become totally independent of City subsidies. The steering committee compared the Civic Center to other City owned venues currently run by non-profits, including the Myrna Loy and Grandstreet Theater. They admitted that the situations are not comparable because the Civic Center is not simply an entertainment venue, it also houses Fire Station #1. The City Commission will decide whether or not to allow the Civic Center to be managed by a nonprofit created by the City.

Recommendation: The HCC recommends that the City Commission take its time to thoughtfully decide whether to allow the Civic Center to be managed by a nonprofit. Meanwhile, the manager of the Civic Center should work to maximize usage of the building. As soon as it is fiscally possible, air conditioning should be added to make the building usable year-round.

Fund #521-Water – The Water Treatment Plant (WTP) requests funds to optimize plant operations with new chemical feed systems and pumps, enabling them to treat our water using less chemical product, fewer backwashes, and less wastewater. Requested upgrades to the PreSettlement Building (natural gas heater and primary and secondary HVAC systems) would save 25-50% in natural gas and other costs. In addition to improving the current water supply system, WTP is developing a Master Water Plan for future (next 25 years) water supplies, sources, and needs. A comprehensive Water Master Plan should consider the needs and interests of current and future City residents, including those in areas adjacent to Helena. Helena currently relies on two sources of water: Upper Ten Mile and the Missouri River, both of which have certain vulnerabilities (fire, lack of snowpack, harmful algal blooms, etc.). Helena could add groundwater as its third potable water source. Decreasing consumption is the other half of the equation that can allow Helena to better meet its future water needs.

Fund #531-Wastewater – Staff and management at the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) continue to look for opportunities to conserve energy and water resources. They requested funding for a standby generator and other equipment (e.g., roll-off containers, secondary sampler, etc.). The WWTF is also developing a Wastewater Master Plan to take a holistic look at the wastewater collection, sources, volume, and treatment of wastewater to effectively plan for future scenarios.

Recommendation: Planning for future water quantity and quality and wastewater treatment is critical as population growth continues throughout the region. The City Master Plan is needed to address the needs of the City's projected population. In addition, a longer-range (time and geographic) study is needed to address future roles and responsibilities for serving regional needs and the City's role in addressing these needs, if any.

The City Water/Wastewater Master Plan should consider climate change and its effect on flooding, reduced snow pack, drought, and fire needs. The plan should consider protecting the City's existing supply sources such as Ten-Mile, Missouri River, and groundwater. The plan should also address reducing future demand through education, incentives, and disincentives. Finally, the plan should address finding needed funding such as by increasing water/sewer rates as well as supporting other funding sources.

The regional longer-term (20-30 years) analysis of water quantity and quality and wastewater treatment should be based on the existing and future demands of regional growth, the

geographic extent of that growth, the impacts of climate change, impacts of growth on groundwater sources, maintenance of water quality, and future water supply sources. This regional study should be funded by and include representatives from the City, County, business/industry, existing conservation and other districts, and the public. It should address the future demand on these systems, the costs of meeting these demands, who pays, and the pros and cons of ways to meet the demand – such as extending City services, forming a regional water/wastewater district, forming a number of independent districts, incorporation of another municipality, privatizing the system, etc.

Fund #522, 532-Water/Sewer Service Lines – Service lines connect homes to City water and sewer mains, bringing clean water to homes and removing waste water. The average service line in the City of Helena is 49 years old. Older pipes sometimes fail and the pipe needs to be replaced. When that happens the City of Helena can help homeowners who have paid, via their City utility bills, into the Water Service Line Fund (#522) or the Sewer Service Line Fund (#532). Currently the monthly charge is \$2.50 on residential water and wastewater accounts. These charges will be collected until June, 2030.

Recommendation: The HCC supports the continuation of this homeowner loan program. Because the amount of the funds currently loaned out to residents increased between FY2020 and FY2021 by 148% (water) and 270% (wastewater), we conclude that homeowners are well aware of the loan program’s existence. We support a continued publicity effort to inform homeowners of this program.

Fund #542, 543, 546-Solid Waste, Fund #547-Recycling - The Helena Citizen Conservation Board has asked the City to allocate funding for a waste reduction strategic plan. The plan will focus on ways to reduce the generation of waste materials using Reduce, Re-Use, & Refuse principles. HCC supports funding such a plan. HCC also supports funding a waste audit, or waste characterization plan to help inform the waste reduction strategic plan.

We have learned that the Public Works Department will ask for funds to develop a master plan for the Transfer Station. The focus of this plan is post-consumer waste - what to do with the waste once it arrives at the Transfer Station. If this is true the two plans can inform and dovetail with each other but their focus is different so they need to be two distinct plans.

Recommendation: Allocate funds in the FY2022 budget for the waste reduction strategic plan to find ways to reduce generation of waste materials and for a waste audit to inform writing the waste reduction strategic plan. Consider adding collection bins at existing off-site recycling drop off locations to collect glass and plastic recyclables. Currently they can only be collected at the Transfer Station or through Helena Recycling, a private recycling service).

Fund #563-Bill Roberts Golf Course and Muni’s Restaurant - Golf maintenance, golf and restaurant operation, debt service, and capital programs are fully funded through user fees including greens fees, merchandise sales, restaurant sales, and tournaments.

As with many entertainment and recreational venues, Fund 563 has struggled with revenues in the midst of COVID-19. The management team has done everything they can to provide a safe and fun environment for the citizens of Helena to enjoy.

The city issued \$2.1 Million of bonds in FY2018 to finance a new pro shop, new clubhouse, and to implement ADA compliance upgrades. This resulted in the creation of a full-service restaurant, Muni's, as opposed to the simple menu of the previous clubhouse. The restaurant has received positive reviews and is poised to contribute to the self-supporting operation in a large way.

Recommendation: The HCC recommends that the City approve the transfer of the outstanding bond repayment expense attributable to Muni's from Fund 563 to the General Fund. Since the loss to Fund 563 from the bond repayment expense is already covered by the General Fund, the HCC believes it appropriate that the General Fund assume the liability for the bond repayment. The HCC encourages the City to expect all operations at Bill Roberts Golf Course to become self-sustaining.

Special Revenue Funds

Fund #226-Community Development - Annual Federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are used for capital projects such as structures, infrastructure, facilities and low-income housing and must meet specific criteria for using these funds. CDBG funds can be allocated by the City to public and non-profit agency service providers. Proposed uses of CDBG funds and any local Community Development funds mentioned during discussions were for additions of more affordable housing units, an update and rehabilitation of the Stewart Homes complex operated by HHA, a transitional shelter for women and families, and additional housing for elderly populations, populations with special needs and homeless youth, and a mental health facility.

Recommendation: The HCC supports use of local and CDBG funds for these purposes.

Fund #233-Public Arts Project - The HCC feels art strengthens the Helena economy by driving tourism and revenue to local businesses. Art also has a positive social impact leading to higher civic engagement, social cohesion, improved child welfare, and lower poverty rates.

Events such as *Chalk Up Helena* should grow and become more of a community wide event that could raise money for future public art in Helena. The HCC anticipates more memorial installations akin to the *Equity Fountain* in Hill Park and the soon-to-be-installed *Boundy Memorial*. Residents and visitors enjoy the traffic signal box covers and the ghost signs on historic buildings. The HCC hopes that Helena's public art will grow and be more dynamic, becoming an attraction for both visitors and residents.

Recommendation: The HCC recommends that the City of Helena continue to support the area of public arts through funding, community projects, events, and outreach.

Fund #235-Open Space District Maintenance - For Helena, surrounded by open lands and forest, wildfire is a real threat. As more land is included in our open space portfolio, wildfire

mitigation becomes a priority. Wildfire on land and forest surrounding the city is the responsibility of the County, United States Forest Service (USFS), and Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). To prevent new wildfire, the Parks & Recreation Department has employed several measures, largely to reduce the amount of fuel on the forest floor. The Tri-County Fire Safe Working Group educates citizens about wildfire and the measures they can take to mitigate forest fuel on their property. The city should continue to work with this organization and, if necessary, contribute funding and staff time. An effort in the past using goats to eat toad-flax weeds also served to reduce fuels that aid in wildfire spread. Poor forest health, caused by the depredations of insects and disease, should also be studied. Appropriating funding for forest-fuel thinning is a major objective of Parks & Recreation. The city receives grants to help pay for contract thinning crews and equipment. The city should continue to leverage these grants to offset city budget commitments.

Recommendations: Support the cooperative relationship with Tri-County and support with funding and staff, where appropriate, the education/outreach effort. The budget should reflect city support of continued forest fuel mitigation. It should also reflect support for wildfire response equipment as appropriate for fire mitigation. All forest fuel reduction grants and matching grants should be pursued to minimize taxpayer costs. Support forest health efforts, realizing that a healthy forest saves taxpayer costs.

Fund #237-Urban Forestry – While Helena can count on a mutual-aid response from the County, USFS, and DNRC should wildfire spread to city property, landowners too must be prepared to respond to urban wildfire. With that in mind, the Fire Department has purchased wildland fire vehicles (Type 6 engines).

Recommendations: Support the Urban Forestry Department’s efforts to proactively replace our aging Ash Trees ahead of the Emerald Ash Borer threat. Support the department’s efforts to work with Growing Friends and other groups to increase the canopy cover in the 6th Ward. Provide additional administrative support so foresters and arborists can concentrate on forestry and spend less time on administrative tasks.

Fund #238-Loan Repayment - This fund accounts for repayments of loans made by the city to qualified individuals or organizations such as Helena's unique Alternative Energy Loan Program where zero-interest loans are made to successful applicants and those loans are paid back over a ten-year period as part of the property's tax assessment. This is a revolving loan so as the loan is repaid, the funds return to the Loan Program. To date, 28 homeowners have participated in this program, installing solar panels at their residences. The current budget anticipates additional funding (\$60,000) to this popular program.

Recommendation: The HCC recommends that the City continue to support the successful Alternative Energy Loan program and invest additional funds to increase the number of residents able to participate in this program at any given time.

Fund #260-Fire Safety Levy - Beginning in fiscal year 2019, this fund records revenues and expenditures from the voter-approved Fire Department Supplemental Levy. A sizeable portion is transferred to the General Fund to cover personnel costs for the approved firefighters and the remainder is available for capital for the Helena Fire Department.

Recommendation: The HCC recommends that the City conduct a study to identify the costs, logistics, and feasibility of providing an additional fire station to the Helena community. The HCC realizes the importance of, and need for, this additional fire station and encourages the City to prioritize the funding of this additional station.

Montana Business Assistance Connection - The Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC) was created with the expressed purpose of improving the economy and livability of Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, and Meagher counties. They help businesses start up, improve, expand, relocate or transition to new ownership.

Recommendation: The HCC continues to support the acquisition of MBAC funds for the upcoming fiscal year. MBAC provides a limited economic development service to the City which does not appear to be available internally and provides a public-private connection.

Fund #406-TIF Railroad District / Fund #407-TIF Downtown District - The Railroad Urban Renewal District was created by the Commission in January 2016 by ordinance 3214. The Railroad TIF District encompasses a large area of property bordering the MRL railroad. The State Department of Revenue approved it effective January 1, 2016. The Downtown Urban Renewal District was created by the City Commission in September 2018 by ordinance 3242. The Downtown TIF District encompasses a large area of property commonly known as Downtown Helena. The state Department of Revenue approved it effective January 1, 2019. Both of these TIF districts will last 15 years unless debt is issued that could extend it for the life of the debt or 40 years, whichever is shorter.

Recommendation: One of the primary goals of TIF funding is to increase the underlying taxes so when the TIF District ends, the increased property tax income, anticipated to be more than if the TIF district were not formed, would be shared with other taxing districts. Consequently, the HCC recommends the city develop a plan to identify a long-term strategy that utilizes the railroad and downtown TIF funds to promote economic development. This plan should aim to proactively address issues or needs rather than respond to them as they are requested. Some portion of the revenues should be set aside to address specific district needs or issues, but funds should be earmarked to address specific needs or problems that are identified as a hamper on economic development and the tax base in the district. One specific instance is the Downtown Master Plan's recommendation about the need to upgrade the walking mall – sidewalks and other surfaces, painting, maintenance, etc. Downtown is the City's center of small business and a major tax base; enhancement of the mall will help to attract more visitors and attract new business to vacant store fronts and buildings. This could include looking at the 'entertainment space' and options for its use or future infill development.

Fund #450-Sidewalk Improvements - Sidewalks are used daily in Helena by people going to work, walking their dogs, walking to school, and exercising. Sidewalks are also used by wheelchair bound residents, for whom the sidewalks are impassable if they are crumbling or the concrete panels heaved due to tree roots or the freeze/thaw cycle. Maintaining good condition sidewalks is essential for Helena to remain a walkable community. Currently it is the responsibility of the homeowner or shopkeeper to maintain the sidewalks abutting their home or shop. When the sidewalk deteriorates it is the responsibility of the homeowner or shopkeeper to replace the sidewalk. The City makes loans to sidewalk owners out of the Sidewalk Improvements Fund. The sidewalk program has a yearly budget of \$150,000. Ten-year loans at 0% interest are given to applicants until the fund runs out. Demand for sidewalk loans exceeds the funding available.

Recommendation: The Transportation Department has developed several options for funding the maintenance of Helena's sidewalk network. Currently the Commission is considering which option(s) best solve this problem. HCC believes that well maintained sidewalks are a necessity. We hope the Commission will decide on the option that keeps the greatest amount of sidewalk maintained at the lowest possible expense to the owner. Because everyone uses the sidewalks, not just the homeowner or shopkeeper, we suggest the Commission find a program that everyone pays into equally.

ARPA Funds - Helena is projected to receive around \$8 million. The state has matching grants for eligible water and wastewater projects. The City should use as much of the \$8 million on necessary water and wastewater projects as possible to get the largest match from the state. Following this strategy should free up the other city accounts to fund different non-ARPA-eligible projects. If ARPA funds are reflected in the budget, they will likely be maximized through Public Works as opposed to Community Development.