



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

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

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

Excused: Samson Boyd, Ryan Schwochert, David Beach

Guests: Paul Pacini, Andrea Optiz, City Manager Rachel Harlow-Schalk, Dr. G, Dirk, Ann Brodsky,

A quorum was established.

Approval of November Minutes

No amendments, comments or changes to minutes. Stand approved.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

No comments shared.

Election of Officers

Nominating Committee Report – Denise Roth Barber – The nominating committee composed of Denise Roth Barber, Bob Habeck and Ben Kuiper reached out to members of the HCC to see if they wanted to serve as an Executive Officer. After these discussions with HCC members, the slate of officers remains the same: Chair – Dylan Klapmeier, Co-Chair – Sumner Sharpe, Treasurer – Nancy Perry, Secretary – Meg Bishop.

Denise asks if there are any nominations from the floor. There are none. If no HCC member has any concerns or objections about the slate of officers, the slate can be adopted by unanimous consent. HCC members are asked if there are any objections/concerns regarding the slate of officers – 35 seconds is allowed for responses. No objections. The slate of officers is unanimously approved:

Chair: Dylan Klapmeier

Co-Chair : Sumner Sharpe

Treasurer: Nancy Perry

Secretary: Meg Bishop

Dylan K. comments that all these officers are ineligible to run next year because they can't succeed themselves more than once. Sumner S. also says he hopes other will step up to serve on the Executive Committee in 2022.

Guest Presenter:

Andrea Opitz- Executive Director – Helena Tourism Alliance

Andrea mentions the new Helena Tourism Alliance (HTA) work plan document. Peggy will share via email with HCC members.

The HTA's mission is to promote and preserve Helena as a destination location and to increase the occupancy in Lodging in Helena. The HTA receives \$2 assessment fee from lodging dollars and they use this money to market Helena. HTA is essentially a destination marketing organization, but during the pandemic, their mission has been more about supporting local stakeholders and tourism partners.

HTA promotes through:

Leisure recruitment

Group Tours

Partnering with hotels

The Tourism Improvement Grant Program – this program helps support events being held in Helena. In 2019 the Grant Program was re-configured and now grants are chosen by HTA board members 2 times per year.

HTA also promotes Sports/Tournament Events such as Youth Soccer, MT. High School Events, Speech & Debate

HTA also promote Art & Culture Events

HTA promotes Bike Helena and the TrailRider program

HTA has a Visitor's center in Reeders Alley.

Again, because of COVID, HTA is not actively promoting but creating awareness about Helena. The www.HelenaMT.com webpage has recently been re-designed for a better visitor experience. HTA also partners with the Helena Convention Bureau, the Helen BID Downtown Helena where they leverage federal dollars to help fund the Safety and Adventure Campaign.

Meg Bishop asks if in fact HTA does promote Helena as a Silver Level international mountain biking destination. If so, this may approach industrial level tourism that may negatively affect Helena.

Andrea Opitz says yes Helena is promoted as an international Silver Level biking destination. In 2013 Helena was certified as a Bronze destination, then in 2016 there were additional trails added that classified Helena as a Silver level destination. In 2019 Helena did re-certify for 4 years as a Silver Level destination. Andrea states that she didn't think Helena could qualify as a Gold Level international destination because the trail system was not contiguous.

Meg Bishop cautions that this promotion and even more connected longer trails may harm the Helena community by having industrial tourism at a level that creates adverse impacts.

Andrea O. mentions a U of M recreation study in 2017 on trail usage and this study said 80% of usage was by locals and 20% usage was by visitors. The TrailRider program bus logs its riders and it seems to follow the U of M study, showing 82% local usage and 18 % visitor usage.

Meg Bishop suggests a broader discussion about the impacts of potential industrial tourism. It can create many issues on multi-use trails.

Meg Bishop says the Tourism Alliance needs to do what is best for Helena – thinking ahead about potential future impacts. Meg states that there may be many adverse effects on other parts of the community if tourism grows in an international way.

Andrea talks about the importance of trail etiquette on multi-use trails. Signage is important. Meg Bishop says trails for multi-use may have multiple impacts on the users. Not all uses are compatible.

Diana Hammer asks if Andrea Optiz is interested in promoting the idea, and if Helena Tourism has signed on to the idea of having passenger rail service through Helena. Andrea says she is personally in favor of the idea and she did attend a summit on the issue. Not all commissioners attending the summit were in favor of the idea.

Sumner Sharpe asks where does Tourism fee go and how does it relate to the City Budget? Andrea says the funds are collected and the numbers are reported to the City and placed on the County tax bill. This is based on the prior year's tax bill. The Helena Tourism Alliance receives 2 checks annually from the City. The Tourism Alliance must submit its work plan and budget to the City for approval.

Dylan Klapmeier asks how is the Tourism Alliance looking forward to 2021? Andrea states leisure tourism is where "it's at" now. Tour groups and conferences can not happen easily with COVID restrictions. The Tourism Alliance hope to capture visitors that are travelling half way between the Parks (Yellowstone/Glacier). Helena loses visitors because it is not on the I90 corridor and I15 closure at the Canadian border has meant a huge loss of Canadian tourists. The Tourism Alliance is promoting Safety and Travel and Destination between the Parks. There is also branding of Helena as a Learning Center (MT. Learning Center Canyon Ferry – possible new large telescope) and as Heritage Tourism Site (history hikes).

TJ Lehman asks about the TrailRider Bus. Andrea responds: the last bus only lasted one season. They are now moving towards using a passenger van funded by sponsorship with a start-up in mid-May.

Meg Bishop asks if the Helena Tourism Alliance has kept records of who rides the TrailRider bus – hikers vs. bikers numbers. Andrea states no. Andrea wonders why there is this perception that the bus is biker heavy. All types of users are welcome. Maybe a survey of ridership would gather good information.

Colleen Murphy – States she likes the idea of having an Education theme to promote Helena tourism. Most importantly, the city needs to beautify the entrances into the city. There are too many billboards – should be a billboard ordinance. The landscaping on Euclid has been sorely neglected and looks awful now. The visual esthetics as one enters the city from the west or north/south needs to be improved.

Andrea Opitz agrees. There is poor directional signage and visitors have a hard time finding downtown. The Helena Tourism Alliance is working on wayfinding (referring back to a 2008 study) to make travel around Helena for newcomers much easier.

Helena Tourism BID Workplan 2021 document. Contact the HCC coordinator, Peggy, and she can forward the document to you.

Guest Presenter Paul Pacini – Public Transportation in Helena

Paul discusses what a dependable bus and bus route should look like in Helena. He is a mass transit supporter – it is the soul of the community. Paul feels the Capital City Transit buses are nicely sized, clean and pleasant, but there is an invisibility factor to Helena's buses. People don't know locations, cost and routes. There is the big red T, but visitors/tourists don't know what that means. Paul feels there could be a huge increase in ridership and income from Helena's bus service if:

1. There were signage updates. The big red T included the words "Bus Stop"
2. There was more information: Routes, Schedules, Times
3. There was information on how to pay? Credit Card, cash, token, exact change...

Paul states there are Bus Stops at major sites of interest e.g. the Capitol, but few bus stops in residential neighborhoods. He also says it is very difficult to find out information about the bus. Do you need to call dispatch? Do you need an app on your phone? Tourists and visitors will not have such an app on their phone.

Paul recommends that the City of Helena take these ideas/updates into consideration and implement them.

1. Route Map
2. Correct Signage – Red T = Bus Stop
3. Bus Schedule
4. Cost and how to pay
5. Residential Neighborhood stops

Meg Bishop agrees with Paul's recommendations. Paul says if a passenger train does stop in Helena, tourist will get off the train and need bus service. Both of these mass transit updates will be a huge boon to the economy of Helena.

John Andrew mentions that a wayfinding kiosk with bus information would be helpful.

The City of Helena said that ridership of the bus dropped significantly from 2010 to 2019 because of the change from Dial –a- Ride to Capital T., but Paul Pacini feels the drop was due to the citizens and visitors not knowing about the bus and the ideas mentioned above.

Dylan Klapmeier says the HCC would welcome a written recommendation with Paul's ideas.

Officer Reports:

Treasurer Report – Nancy Perry reports on the Budget Committee. The Budget Committee is comprised of Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Sumner Sharpe. Part of the HCC's duty is to make recommendations to the City Commission on the City of Helena budget. The budget is already being put together for year 2022. Learning about the budget is a great way to familiarize yourself with funds, processes, and services of the city of Helena.

The time line of the budget process has already started and the Budget Committee has met with the new Finance Director, Sheila Danielson.

The City budget timeline in a brief format is as follows:

January – Staffing plan and personnel needs.

February – Develop Strategic Goals and priorities. HCC has input in this process. Our priorities list that you just participated in will be presented at a Commission meeting on 2/17/21.

March – Finance department will calculate its Revenue projection
Finance department will develop its Operating Budget
Finance department will develop its Capital Budget (for new major expenditures)

April – Consolidation of Operating Budget and Capital Budget
Draft Preliminary Budget for City Manager Approval
Commissioners will meet with City Department Heads for discussions

May – HCC will present its Draft Recommendation about entire City Budget to other HCC members at a meeting. If approved at HCC meeting this Final Report will Be presented to the Commission in late May.

Budget Committee – Sumner Sharpe – Sumner states the Priorities Document was based on three draft strategic plan priorities from the City. They are:

1. Improve neighborhood Livability
2. Promote Healthy and Sustainable Growth in Helena
3. Promote a Safe Community

Colleen Murphy says her priorities are not listed – hers are Emergency Services and Police Public Safety. Colleen has a listing of all the Police committee meetings, of which HCC is not a stakeholder, but HCC members are permitted to attend a member of the public. Colleen will forward the list to Peggy, and she will send it out to HCC members.

Outreach Committee Report: Outreach Committee continues to meet and has prepared the priorities report from your email responses. Peggy will send that out soon.

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman – her mic was not working via zoom. Nothing new to report. She continues to work with both the Budget and Outreach Committees, update the webpage and provide minutes of HCC meetings.

HPAC Report – No updates, they did not have a quorum at their last meeting.

Neighborhood District Reports – no specific neighborhood reports.

Committee Updates

Dylan Klapmeier states that current HCC representatives on City advisory board will remain the same for 2021.

Civic Center Board – John Andrew – At the last Commission meeting of 2020, there was a resolution extending the Civic Center Steering Committee along with having the RFP that was created to move forward. Deadline is April 30th, 2021 for a new Advisory Board to be established.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Tom Woodgerd – There is currently a count being tabulated on the city trails of hikers vs. bikers by Wilbur Rehman. The count is informal, but will be informative. There has also been discussion about Spring Meadow Lake and Handicapped Access.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – Gary Burton presentation at last meeting.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – Meeting on 1/12/21 was discussion about e-bikes. Many participants and interactive. A consensus was reached that more information about e-bikes was needed. Brad Langsather will compile information on comparable communities and how they deal with e-bikes in relation to trail systems. Currently Helena's open lands don't allow motorized vehicles.

Transportation Coordinating Committee: After some confusion – Joe will be attending his first meeting in February

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth-Barber – will move to New Business to discuss the Waste Reduction recommendation

Old Business

Recommendations already voted upon and approved by HCC include 1. DeFord Trail to become ADA compatible and 2. Having a person with mobility issues serve on HOLMAC. These two recommendations will be on the 2/3/21 Administrative Commission meeting. They can be found in their entirety on the HCC webpage.

New Business

Citizen Conservation Board Recommendation of Waste Reduction Resolution – Denise Roth Barber says Citizen Conservation Board (CCB) was established to address Climate Change. The Waste Committee is a part of that – it advises the City of Helena. The CCB wants the city to adopt this Resolution. The Resolution has two main principles:

1. For the city to reduce its waste stream by 50% by 2040 with an interim goal of 2030.
2. To fund a Strategic Plan to reach this goal.

The Waste Reduction Resolution will be presented at the 2/3/21 Admin. Commission meeting, and then again at the 2/22/21 Commission meeting. The CCB hopes to generate more public interest and support.

Denise, along with the CCB, requests that the HCC endorse this document.

Sumner Sharpe asks if recycling is included? Denise responds that recycling will be further addressed in the detail of the Strategic Plan element.

Ben Kennedy asks about the 60K. Denise explains it was a number that was reached with the help of consultants to give sufficient coverage to reach a Strategic Plan. CCB is working with Pat Judge (CCB liaison) City of Helena Sustainability Coordinator and the Public Works Department on the budget.

Bob Habeck asks if there is an existing solid waste plan – there should be, because there needs to be a permit to operate. Denise said they (CCB) have asked for a copy from Public Works, but have not received it.

Diana Hammer says she knows of the plan and it addresses reducing consumption and recycling/diverting waste.

Bob Habeck supports networking the Waste Reduction Resolution into the existing city's Solid Waste Plan. This way the new Resolution can be more easily ingrained into law/permit or rule.

Meg Bishop suggests there be a section #8 added to the Resolution that requires the new Waste Reduction Resolution be added to/tied to/ the existing plan. Several HCC members agree with this idea. Denise says it's important to get the HCC's endorsement tonight because the Resolution is on the 2/3/21 Administrative Commission meeting agenda.

A motion was made and seconded. **Motion:** The HCC supports this statement of Waste Reduction and hopes the City of Helena incorporates it into its city's plan.

Discussion ensued: Dylan knows reduce, reuse and recycle, but what does refuse mean? Denise responds that it means for an individual to refuse to take e.g. plastic bags or retainers that produce comes in, or to refuse take- out containers. Dylan also asks about the Sustainability Coordinator position and its cost. Denise replies, it is only half-time (Not FTE) and has certainly paid for itself. During the past year the position has found methods of saving within the City. For example – using LEDs in Parking Garages has saved the city approximately 60K per year. So, the salary of the Sustainability Coordinator is certainly valued.

An HCC member asks by what means is the reduction in waste? Denise answers that it is in tons/weight from the transfer stations' weigh-ins.

Another HCC member states that Resolutions to the City are not enforceable. Denise Roth Barber agrees and says that is true, but hopefully if the city commits to a budgeted item, they will more likely follow through.

Dylan K. states he is comfortable supporting the Waste Reduction Resolution without a stance on the 60K budget item.

An HCC member asks if anyone has reached out to Missoula to see how they implemented their plan. Denise RB says yes most definitely, they have had many conversations.

An HCC member asks how do you separate City weight from County weight at the Transfer station? Denise RB answers that is difficult to do. The main idea is to get people to reduce their personal waste before it gets to the transfer station.

Dylan Klapmeier calls for a vote. The motion passes is unanimously. None opposed. No abstentions.

Commission/Administrative Sign ups – Peggy's internet/mic not functioning properly. She will email the sign-up sheet to everyone. Denise Roth Barber will attend 2/22/21.

The Quasi-Judicial/Ex Parte Discussion will have to be moved to a later date.

Meeting was Adjourned at 9:38PM

Next Meeting is February 24th at 7:00pm via Zoom