



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
August 25th, 2021 7:00pm
Via Zoom

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

Attendance: Pat Marron, John Andrew, Tim Chisman, Diana Hammer, Ben Kuiper, Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strachan, Dylan Klapmeier, TJ Lehman, Joseph Lehman, Ryan Schwochert, Karen Wilson, Steve Allen, Denise Roth-Barber, Susan Steffens
Peggy Benkelman(coordinator)

Excused: Nancy Perry, Mike Rooney, Gary Dalton, Samson Boyd, Tom Woodgerd, Ben Kennedy, James Colegrove, Heidi Freidlander, John Walden, Bob Habeck, Chelly Hasquet

Guests: Jacob Garcin (Public Information Officer – City of Helena), Dr. Gregory Thomas (member of the public)

A Quorum was established

Oath of Office: Pat Marron, Susan Steffens, Karen Wilson, Ben Kuiper, John Walden are sworn in.
Members who still need swearing in: Heidi Freidlander, James Colegrove, Michael Rooney.

Approval of June Minutes – Ryan Schwochert mentions a possible coordinator typo error on the amount of water that the Missouri River gives to the Helena Water supply. minutes state 6% - Ryan states that is probably low. Peggy Benkelman will listen again to recording and correct the error. Minutes stand with correction made.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items – None

Guest Speakers: Jacob Garcin – Public Information Office City of Helena

Jake G. states he has been in his position with the city for 5 months now. Before he was hired there was a city PIO, but she only stayed in that position for about 6 months. Jake says the PIO role is as a liaison to both staff and departments to see that information is shared and evaluated. Jake will be presenting a comprehensive communication plan by the end of September. He is looking into better ways to get information out to the community as well as having the community more readily engage with the city.

One of these engagement tools is Be Heard Helena - <https://beheardhelena.com/>.

Be Heard Helena often utilizes surveys to get the public's opinion. Before Jake G. was hired, there was not a lot of consistency of sharing of information within departments and how the city shares this information. Jake is formalizing these expectations. He is gathering new ideas using new technology as well as looking into better ways to communicate and interact with the public.

Jake wanted the HCC to know that the water restrictions have been lifted due to better weather and more precipitation. There should be more E-Bike and E-Scooter conversations gearing up through public engagement on Be Heard Helena. There will also be an Affordable Housing survey online soon at Be Heard Helena.

Steve Allen says he has been meeting with many Helena citizens and they don't know about the Be Heard Helena website. He asks Jake G. what the city's plan for advertising is?

Jake Garcin answers: There are 3 engagement platforms the city has: 1. The City of Helena website <https://www.helenamt.gov/home> 2. Be Heard Helena - <https://beheardhelena.com/> 3. My

Helena App Create an account and track your requests or visit MyHelenaApp.com. The app can be downloaded from iOS App Store or Google Play.

Jake G. says yes the public does have a lack of awareness about the 3 platforms as well as a lack of knowledge on how the platforms operate. Jake says there have been radio ads, outreach on social media, platforms are brought up in meeting notes/minutes and an external newsletter. Resources need to be expanded to get more people to utilize these site/platforms more frequently. The City of Helena continues to look at more traditional marketing as well. water bill inserts may be used.

With the HCC's permission, Peggy Benkelman will post the BeHeardHelena link on the home page of the HCC website. Jake G. appreciates any support the HCC can give.

Sumner Sharpe asks about the type of survey BeHeardHelena uses. Is it random sample? Survey Monkey? Jake G. answers it is a robust survey with a comment section as well as yes and no answers. The city manager is concerned about the system asking for too much personal information. Sumner S. asks who gets access to the data? Can the public access it? Jake G. says the data currently doesn't live in a repository anywhere, but the public can ask for stats etc. and he will get you the information. There has been discussion about having such data easily available online to the public. Right now it is not so easy, unless the city publishes many pdfs relating to each survey.

Sumner S. asks if the HCC could post/use the survey app. Jake says yes - just contact him.

Ryan Schwochert says several of his constituents have asked about a contractor's list. Does the city have one it could share? Jake G. answers the Community Development Department has a list of businesses with licenses, but it is very large and changes frequently. Jake will look into getting a list of contractors to provide.

Dylan Klapmeier asks about how to make the daunting budget document more understandable for the public. Jake Garcin says he shares the public's "pain" of trying to understand the 400 page document. The City Manager and the City Finance Department head have a better vision for the budget format and process. An example was the new Budget Act Tool, which the public could use and input their own numbers and view how a balanced budget is obtained – showing the inner workings.

Dylan K. also suggests that BeHeardHelena should always have some sort of interactive survey posted on it. Dylan wonders where previous survey results are located? Jake Garcin says he has access to the survey results and they are shared according to department and project. The Data is summarized for the Commission to more easily review. Dylan K. says it is helpful to have the survey results shared at Commission meetings.

Dylan also mentions that the HCC can be a sounding board for discussions, especially on certain issues. Dylan mentions the EBike HCC discussion from last February where there were over 80 participants on the Zoom.

Reports of Officers

Chair – Dylan Klapmeier – Dylan mentions a new voting procedure for HCC. On the bottom right of your zoom screen, we will use the smiley face reactions icon – green check for Yea and red x for Nay. If you don't have this zoom version, please post your vote in the chat room. If there are still issues, please unmute yourself and speak up.

Vice-Chair Sumner Sharpe – no update, nothing new to report.

Treasurer – Nancy Perry – excused from meeting – nothing new to report.

John Andrew – Secretary – John mentions he did receive feedback from an HCC member about how we were encouraging new members to attend Commission meetings. Ryan Schwochert asks if John would like to publicly share those concerns – John A. answers he would rather not speak to that – let's just move forward in a positive way, but as an HCC

member, you should always feel comfortable to speak up and/or talk with an Ex. Committee member. (All Commission meeting slots are filled up to Dec. 2021 – openings available are Dec. 1, Dec. 6th, Dec.15, and Dec. 20th)

Dylan K. mentions he still wants better two-way communication between HCC and the Commission. Sumner Sharpe says the smaller focus group approach works well – the Outreach Committee is working hard on getting more online feedback from neighborhoods.

HCC Coordinator – Peggy Benkelman – Peggy continues with the webpage updates and coordinating meetings. She will post the BeHeardHelena link on both the webpage and on the HCC Facebook page. Peggy then reads a COVID alert that came from Drenda Neiman of L&C County Health.

Sumner Sharpe suggests Drenda give the HCC a brief statement message that Peggy B. can send out to all HCC members and all persons on our outreach lists. No HCC members object. Denise wonders if HCC has an Instagram or Twitter page. Peggy mentions that HCC used to have them, but they were closed by HCC around 2018. Dylan K. suggests we can look into having those pages once again.

Committee Updates

Outreach Committee – Diana Hammer – Diana mentions that the committee is decorating the window at the GoodKind building 6th Ave. x Last Chance Gulch for both September and October. Windows will have information about who HCC is and what it does, while encouraging Helena citizens to share their email and look at what recommendations the HCC has made in the past. Since Colleen Murphy has resigned from the HCC, the Outreach Committee is looking for a new member. Ben Kuiper says he is interested.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – The last meeting of HOLMAC was a field trip thru the Whyte property (recently donated to the city & PPLT) Representatives from Prickly Pear Land Trust and City Representatives, Brad Langslather & Kristi Ponzoso were there. Trail System was discussed – Needs of 1. Existing Trails, Maintenance, Closures/Additions, a Novice Loop System, Phase II of ADA trail. Also brought up was the large EBike/EScooter survey with 850 submissions. There were also plans brought up to connect the Whyte property to LeGrande Cannon Blvd.

Civic Center – John Andrew – John A. attended the last Administrative Commission meeting where the City Manager and staff gave their recommendation concerning the Civic Center. The mayor asked them to reach out to the Civic Center Steering Committee, but John A. has not heard if they have done so. Sumner Sharpe heard that the Commission agreed they should meet with the Steering Committee regarding their recommendation of the non-profit approach. The city staff should meet with the Civic Center Steering committee before more discussion is brought up at a Commission meeting.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Tom Woodgerd – Tom is excused, so no report.

Transportation Coordinating Committee – Joe Lehman – meetings are now quarterly, so no meeting until September.

Helena Public Art Committee – no HCC representative (Chelly Hasquet has stepped down from being on the HPAC board) Position won't be filled until January 2022.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer - No updates as Diana was not available to attend the last meeting.

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth Barber – Denise R B says the city is working with both composting companies – they have been given 2 year permits to continue their work. The city is working on their waste reduction plan and they have an RFP out searching to partner with a company. https://www.helenamt.gov/fileadmin/user_upload/RFP_WasteReductionFinal.pdf Denise RB says she has not heard more about the Sustainability Coordinator Position. The CCB is helping with the xeriscape project at the new Law & Justice Center. There is also a group called Solarize who is promoting to have 12 -15 Helena homes get solar panels installed. The City has a revolving 0% interest Solar Panel Loan program. Sumner Sharpe says that if people group together for their purchases, they may get a discount. Diana Hammer says the city is working with *Solar Montana*. The HCC is reminded of the Water Wise Brochure https://www.helenamt.gov/fileadmin/user_upload/Water_Wise_Helena_2021.pdf

Commission Meeting Attendee Report – Ben Kuiper – Ben K. states that the Special Improvement Lighting District was passed. Because of Federal Ex. Orders, the City Manager states that masks must be worn on all Public Transit, this includes: School buses, Airplanes, City Transit, Greyhound buses until at least January of 2022.

Ryan Schwochert – Golf Course Advisory Board – Ryan states that both the chef of Muni's Restaurant and the Superintendent of the Bill Roberts Golf Course will be leaving their positions. Other Committee Updates: Sumner Sharpe speaks about the need for capital improvements at the Civic center. Currently the Civic center operates at a \$400-\$500,000 deficit each year that the city pays for out of its general fund. The city is trying to get that deficit down to \$300,000. Perhaps with a bond issued & capital improvements done, of which Air Conditioning would be one, it is thought that the Civic Center could break even. More discussion and decision making is needed.

Westside Subdivision – Pat Marron - Pat mentions that the Westside Subdivision seems to be moving forward and it could severely impact the citizens of the west side of Helena. Impacts could be felt at trailheads, schools, roads etc. Read more about the subdivision here: <https://www.helenamt.gov/government/departments/community-development/current-projects>

Sumner Sharpe feels the EBike issues should again be a topic for discussion at an HCC Meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:23 PM

Next meeting will be September 22nd, 2021 through Zoom.