



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)  
Minutes  
November 17, 2021 7:00pm  
Via Zoom

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

**Attendance:** Pat Marron, John Andrew, Tim Chisman, Diana Hammer, Joe Lehman, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Mike Rooney, Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strahan, Gary Dalton, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert, TJ Lehman, Karen Wilson, John Walden, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet, Susan Steffens  
Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

**Excused:** Samson Boyd, Tom Woodgerd, John Walden, Heidi Freidlander, James Colegrove

**Guests:** Gloria Soja, Dr. Gregory Thomas, Paige R. Myers

**A Quorum was established**

**Approval of October Minutes** – Minutes stand approved with changes by HCC member Diana Hammer.

**Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items** – Gloria Sonja speaks. Gloria states she is an ordained minister with 17 years of criminal justice system experience in Helena. She understands that the HCC is considering supporting the City of Helena's \$3M to support the homeless. Gloria S. feels the city should not be the primary funder. This is a tri-county issue and each municipality should contribute and have a seat at the table, including State and Federal partners. Gloria sees an increase in fundraising efforts, but she does not see an increase in funding from either the State or Federal level. Gloria sees a steady decline in roads, street and sidewalk maintenance along with an increase in the mental health crisis. There are also many first responder vacancies and they are expected to operate well below healthy standards. We can help with housing, but later, who foots the bill when that housing falls into disrepair? The homeless need to receive substance abuse help. The extra services our police force are expected to provide is a drain on the police force and also a drain on the tax payers. A \$3m band aid is not an answer that the City of Helena can afford.

**Recommended HCC Actions to Improve Outreach and Communications between the HCC and Constituents within Districts – Discussion and approval of this internal document.**

See attached.

Sumner Sharpe speaks about the attached internal document brought up on the screen. He states the HCC is an independent elected body representing 7 neighborhoods (Districts). If one looks on the HCC map, you can see the correlating voter precincts within these Districts. Members of the HCC also sit on committees, sometimes with voting representation, where they keep the rest of the HCC informed about issues within the city. Often the HCC also brings up ideas/recommendations to the City as well. For example the HCC brought up the Southern Railway link. The HCC wants to make sure the City Commission hears our recommendations and responds in some way to them. A problem of the HCC has been its connection between the HCC and each of its 7 neighborhoods at the grassroots level. Renaming the Districts as Neighborhoods may be helpful – or always saying District Neighborhoods, so there is no confusion between neighborhoods and districts. Sumner S. feels the Outreach Committee should be aggressive about using these email lists to inform neighbors. Sumner also thanks Ben Kuiper, Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry and Peggy Benkelman for all their work to promote better HCC outreach. Sumner Sharpe goes over the Outreach Committee document. He reiterates that

it is for the HCC to follow in the future and help “get the ball rolling” for further continued outreach. Sumner mentions the large bullet points:

1. Rename Districts to include the wording Neighborhood Districts. There has been a lot of confusion on Helena residents’ part regarding districts, neighborhoods and precincts.
2. Have the HCC Outreach Committee be a permanent standing committees as are the Budget and Nominating Committees of the HCC.
3. The Secretary job description should include being a member of the Outreach Committee.
4. The Outreach Committee should continue to:
  - Grow its outreach list
  - Divide each District into 4 distinct neighborhoods to be more focused and build interest
5. Improve HCC’s interaction with city-wide issues
  - There has been a problem of timeliness – topics come and go quickly. There needs to be discussion before policy and decisions are made.
  - Improve the HCC’s utilization of a multi-media approach.
6. Continue to involve HCC in City Budget discussions as well as interviews for hiring of department personnel.
7. Get more public recognition for HCC. The public needs to know who HCC is and what they do. This is critical in making the HCC stronger and more effective.
8. At a minimum, yearly orientation for HCC members. Reminder of the HCC purpose and that HCC is not a direct service provider. The HCC should take the lead in making recommendations on specific topics. For instance, at the January 2022 meeting, one of the priority discussions for the year for HCC, could be about homelessness.
9. Request that each HCC member attend an outreach event. Members should also be available to attend Commission meetings and be on Advisory Boards.

Sumner Sharpe hopes the HCC will adopt this internal document and build upon it wisely.

Diana Hammer states the idea of including the word Neighborhood is important as the public gets confused about Districts.

Margaret Strahan agrees. The HCC should develop more neighborhood names such as 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, Upper Westside, South Central etc.

Nancy Perry asks if these neighborhoods would be subdistricts?

Tim Chisman has a question about establishment of the Outreach Committee as a standing committee? Sumner Sharpe says yes, it will become a permanent committee like the budget committee or nominating committee. The persons on the HCC Outreach Committee will not be the members speaking at Commission Meetings. Commission Meeting attendees will be every member of the HCC and vary with dates and sign-ups.

TJ Lehman mentions that constituents in his area also had confusion with Districts vs. Neighborhoods.

Bob Habeck says that the Outreach document is a great primer for the members of 2022 to help start on a strategic plan. He also likes the idea of using colloquial names for neighborhoods within HCC Districts.

Mike Rooney is very interested in having HCC expand its social media outreach. He would like to be on the Outreach Committee. His wife suggested the HCC should have quick meetings with the public at local breweries.

Denise Roth-Barber wants to know when were the HCC District lines last drawn? Bob Habeck replies about 3 years ago. Peggy Benkelman will send out a paper with HCC Districts and how they correlate with Voter Precincts. Peggy says you can also see that as you zoom in on our HCC map located on our webpage.

Nancy Perry asks if you think the Outreach Committee is equivalent to a membership committee? Margaret Strahan replies not necessarily. The HCC just has to keep in constant contact with its members and constituents or it will lose people.

Diana Hammer feels we have made great inroads to establish better 2-way communication with constituents.

Steve Allen noticed that while running for office, many people did know of the HCC. He encourages us to continue to promote meetings within small neighborhoods within districts. Sumner Sharpe reminds us that now we have a coordinator that works for us 20 hours per week (formerly 10 hours per week) and it has made a difference. The HCC needs to remember that the coordinator has a certain level of independence and works under the City Clerk for the Commission, not the City Manager.

Nancy Perry asks Sumner Sharpe to clarify the independence stance of the HCC. Sumner S. replies that the HCC is an independent elected body serving the Commission and Community members under the direction of the City Clerk. The HCC should remain independent. We don't report to City Staff.

Tim Chisman asks about District Representation when all members of a district live close to each other. Sumner says in that case, they would have to choose who represents each of the four smaller neighborhood areas within the district. You still live in the District you represent, but you may have to oversee a different neighborhood area.

Susan Steffens mentions that many people in her HCC District Neighborhood did not know about the HCC. Peggy Benkelman says the HCC has its own webpage <https://www.helenacitizenscouncil.com/home> which also has a direct link from the City of Helena webpage <https://www.helenamt.gov/home> Susan Steffens also mentions that she likes the BeHeardHelena survey link via the city. Susan also says it is important that when you vote if you are serving on a committee, you are representing the HCC, not your personal opinion.

Diana Hammer thanks Nancy Perry for putting together a voter profile for that last election. It was really helpful. At our HCC January meeting, we should have a press release. Dylan Klapmeier said we had one for the 2019 elections, but the IR didn't print anything.

Chelly Hasquet asks about expanding our social media presence, both on Facebook and NextDoor. The HCC does have a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/HelenaCitizensCouncil> and will be expanding its presence on Nextdoor soon. Chelly expresses an interest on being on the Outreach Committee.

Karen Wilson likes the new Outreach Proposal. She especially likes the new member orientation. Karen says she has trouble seeing her district Neighborhood boundaries. Karen W. also mentions she likes the idea of door-hangers – does the HCC have a budget for that? Dylan Klapmeier mentions yes, we have used door-hangers frequently in the past. We still have some from the last go around.

Sumner Sharpe wants to remind everyone that in the past, there often were not any Ex. Committee meetings. Now we have them monthly and they have been very productive and effective.

Dylan Klapmeier mentions that this is the last HCC meeting of 2021. There will be Ex. Committee and Outreach Committee meetings in the interim.

Sumner Sharpe reminds us that in the HCC Bylaws, it states, that the Secretary is responsible for publicity and will be on the Outreach Committee. If you are interested in this position please tell the nominating committee.

Margaret Strachan is worried that the City Manager's new team captains for neighborhood outreach will put another level between the communication of citizens and HCC members with department heads. She believes there should not be additional layers of bureaucracy.

**Officer Nomination Update** – Sumner Sharpe gives us an update. He says we are still getting clarification on the several write-in votes in district #6. Five people had 2 votes each. HCC members may self-nominate or nominate someone else. Please contact the HCC Nominating Committee: Sumner Sharpe, Bob Habeck, Tom Woodgerd.

### **Officer Reports:**

Chair – Dylan Klapmeier – Dylan K. thanks to all who have been active on the HCC. He feels the HCC is positioned to do great work in the future. It looks like the new team will work well with the City Manager, new Commissioners and Mayor.

Vice-Chair – Sumner Sharpe – no new updates

Treasurer – Nancy Perry – no new updates

.Secretary – John Andrew – no new updates

### **Commission Attendees' Reports:**

Karen Wilson – 11/8/21 meeting - apologizes, she got home from work, forgot and then logged into the meeting late. She did hear about a resolution to allow Cable companies to use the City right-of-way to lay cable.

John Andrew – 11/17/21 meeting – John A. noted that Kristi Ponozzo (City Parks/Open Lands Director) will be leaving her position in the spring. Homelessness issues were discussed – especially on Billings Ave. Commissioner Logan and Mayor Collins personally visited with business owners in the area. Police Chief Steve Hagan stated that the police cannot force people to move if there is no place for them to go e.g. shelters are full. So the homeless just move from place to place. There were also 3 more resignations from the Helena Police Department. Nancy Perry asks if there is a reason? John A. replies he doesn't really know – possibly stress, burnout, they have found a higher paying job.

**Coordinator Report** – The official HCC recommendation asking the Commission to better consider its recommendations will officially be an agenda item on the 12/6 Commission meeting. The 2022 HCC has a slate of 26 members with two openings in District #6 – where two new members will be appointed. The newly established Housing Trust Fund is looking for members, if anyone on the HCC is interested, please apply. It is easy for persons within Helena to know what district neighborhood they live in, just refer to our webpage and input the address, or zoom in on the map provided.

### **Committee Updates**

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – The City is still reviewing the Open Lands projects and input from you is welcomed. The comment period is until 11/23. At the last meeting, it was disheartening that the DeFord trail plan was not implemented. Bicycles were banned on the lower DeFord Trail saying the bicyclists will have to use the Davis Gulch Trail.

[https://www.helenamt.gov/fileadmin/user\\_upload/DeFord Bike Skills Course EA Final - With Maps.pdf](https://www.helenamt.gov/fileadmin/user_upload/DeFord_Bike_Skills_Course_EA_Final_-_With_Maps.pdf)

Civic Center – John Andrew – Soon the chair of the Civic Center steering committee will speak to the Commission about the alternative non-profit approach to run the Civic Center.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council –board position will be open in January. No update.

Transportation Coordinating Committee – no update, next meeting in December.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – no update, next meeting in December

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth Barber – The Recycling Committee Chair, Kim Carly presented a Power Point. The new Sustainability Coordinator hire Holly Chandler started her work

last week. The City has selected a company that will develop a strategic waste reduction plan. When the contract is officially signed, Denise R-B will let us know their name.

Ryan Schwochert – Golf Course Advisory Board – The City has hired a new golf pro for the Bill Roberts course. It is Todd Federer from Green Meadow Country Club. He will also be overseeing the Food & Beverage part of the facility.

Sumner Sharpe – Sumner S. reminds members that there are many other boards HCC members can belong to such as TIF district, BID, Zoning, HPAC, Housing Trust Fund.

**Discussion – Open Comments** – Chelly Hasquet mentioned that a neighbor complained of trash in her neighbor's yard. It was suggested Chelly could refer her to Sharon Haugen (Community Development) and start a Community Decay grievance procedure.

Sumner Sharpe – Sumner also suggests that we contact all the incoming HCC members and request that they bring 2-3 ideas about city issues to discuss at the January meeting.

Diana Hammer thanks the Ex. Committee for their leadership. She also mentions that Chuck Marron of the "Strong Town's Movement" is coming to the Civic Center to speak on January 10<sup>th</sup>. She will get the details and send them to Peggy Benkelman to forward to the HCC.

Margaret Strachan wishes everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and TJ Lehman asks everyone to shop Local for Xmas.

**Meeting Adjourned at 8:50 PM**

**Next meeting will be January 26th, 7:00PM, at the Civic Center Ballroom – IN PERSON**

Due to COVID restrictions, please don't bring extra guests, masks are recommended, and we will be socially distanced.

OUTREACH RECOMMENDATION DISCUSSED IS BELOW



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**November 17, 2021**

**To:** The Helena Citizens Council

**From:** HCC Outreach Committee (Ben Kuiper, Diana Hammer Nancy Perry, Sumner Sharpe)

**Subject:** Recommended HCC Actions to Improve Outreach and Communications between the HCC and Constituents within Districts

**City Charter: Section 4.01:** “There shall be seven ( 7) Neighborhood Councils, collectively comprising a Helena Citizens’ Council. Recommendations:

- Rename Districts as Neighborhood Councils or Neighborhood Districts
- Establish the Outreach Committee as a standing committee (Outreach and Communications) of the HCC
- The HCC Secretary shall be a member of this Committee

**Improve HCC Communications with constituents within Districts to better represent neighborhoods. Recommendations:**

- Continue to grow the email outreach list for each neighborhood district through various sources such as:
  - Improve link on the HCC webpage that says “join our email list”
  - Collect emails from City of Helena Public Information Officer
  - Utilize *NextDoor* with help from each HCC District member
  - Use the City’s Survey Tool – *BeHeardHelena* to collect email addresses
  - Contacts with neighborhood or local groups and organizations to identify potential additions to each neighborhood district email list
- Divide each HCC District into four (4) distinct neighborhood areas and generate contacts and communications within each subarea to get input on specific topics or policies under HCC consideration, to better understand neighborhood concerns, or gather ideas for improvements or improving City programs or policies. Suggestions:
  - On-line communication using email lists to seek input, survey constituents, or solicit feedback
  - On-line meetings
  - Annual open houses
  - Monthly or quarterly on-line or in-person meetings once per month about specific neighborhood issues.
  - Neighborhood gatherings such as block parties or picnics
  - Door-to-door outreach conversations, door hangers, and handouts,

**Improve HCC as a neighborhood voice providing input on City-Wide issues, program and policies. Recommendations:**

- Encourage early involvement of the HCC by the City Manager, staff and Commissioners as programs and policies are being developed. The HCC as a focus group represents all parts of the City. This will also help the HCC in the development of its recommendations to the Commission.

- Improved HCC use of various forms of communications with citizens such as:
  - Use of City surveys to gather information and feedback on specific neighborhood topics
  - Outreach via *Facebook* and *NextDoor*
  - Annual water bill inserts
  
- Continued HCC involvement in City budget discussions and in hiring of senior City staff positions
  
- Improve public recognition of HCC and its role in advising the City Commission on budgetary and development matters by making its purpose known. Suggestions:
  - Regular communications with HCC email list and *NextDoor* postings
  - Maintain and update HCC display materials; encourage HCC representatives use outreach materials, and set up public displays at City-County building and other venues
  - Participate in or provide HCC information table and presentations at public events such as Farmer's Market, Chamber of Commerce, Hometown Helena or other organizations and clubs throughout our community.
  - Provide presentations at appropriate venues such as Hometown Helena, Chamber of Commerce, and other clubs throughout our community.
  - Sponsor an HCC event for the public to provide opportunities for city-wide conversations and educate the public about HCC's purpose etc.
  - Seek out press, radio and TV opportunities to inform public about HCC including
  - Opinion Pieces and Letters to the Editor.
  - Provide HCC information brochure at locations such as library, City-County building and other locations
  - Consider new tagline such as "Your Voice Is Important"
  
- Provide regular orientation sessions for HCC representatives
  - Provide annual updates for HCC Members – this would include
  - expectations in their role as an HCC member, City protocols, City organization and budget information, etc
  
- Request that each HCC member attend one outreach event each year, continue to attend Commission meetings, and participate or observe other City advisory committee meetings to keep the HCC informed as well as provide an HCC presence.