



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
April 28th, 2021 7:00pm
Via Zoom

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

Attendance: John Andrew, Tim Chisman, Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Mike Rooney, Colleen Murphy, Gary Dalton, Dylan Klapmeier, Tom Woodgerd, Ryan Schwochert, TJ Lehman, Steve Allen, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth-Barber, Chelly Hasquet, Susan Steffens, Peggy Benkelman(coordinator)

Excused: Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strachan, Samson Boyd, David Beach, Jason Welnel, Ben Kennedy, Joe Lehman, Jamie Dwyer, Pat Marron.

Guests: Sheila Danielson, Bill Lombardi, Dr. G.

A Quorum was established

Approval of March 2021 Minutes

Chair Dylan Klapmeier asks if there are any changes or corrections to the minutes for March 2021. None mentioned. Chair states minutes stand approved.

Introduction of New District #7 member – Susan Steffens. Susan stated she is happy to join HCC. She has been in Helena for 28 years and has been involved with many Helena activities while raising her children. She was Vice-Chair on the Public Arts Committee for 5 years and Chair for 1 year.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

John Andrew shared that he attended the Administrative Meeting today and it went long. Mostly it was concerned with the Civic Center, so discussion about the Capital Transit Recommendation was side-lined. Hopefully, it will be brought up again at a future meeting. Dylan Klapmeier suggests we still approach the Commission about getting better feedback regarding the HCC's recommendations. After the City Budget is approved, the HCC will work on this topic.

Guest Speaker – Sheila Danielson – Finance Department Director

Sheila states her department is busy working with Department heads and formalizing their requests. She has also had several meetings with City Manager Harlow- Shalk about the city's operational needs. Because of the Covid Pandemic, several funds had significant revenue losses. These were the Golf Course, Civic Center and Parking Funds. Discussions have been had on how to support those operations until longer-term solutions can be had.

The Finance department's budget document will go to the City Manager by May 1st. The City Manager will then pull together her Preliminary Final budget to present at an Administrative Commission meeting on May 12th.

The Timeline for budget discussions/presentations is:

May 12th online presentation by both Sheila Danielson and City Manager Harlow-Schalk.
May 17th budget discussion at City Commission Meeting to include needs/ discussion of both Commission Members and the HCC. The public is welcome as well.
May 19th – this date will be left open and filled with more budget discussion if needed.
May 26th – Final presentation of the budget.
May 31st – All comments/suggestions must have been submitted
June 7th – Final document prepared
June 28th – Final Adoption of the Budget – at special Commission Meeting

Dylan K. asks about the Financial Audit now being conducted on the City of Helena. Sheila states that when she arrived in her new position, she found out the comprehensive annual audit report was not complete. It has been hard to finalize numbers and the processes were not clear, so the Finance department had to start from scratch and this prolonged the time getting documents to the auditors. Sheila D. feels the audit will be complete in about two weeks with no negative findings.

The Finance department, along with the City Manager wanted to utilize new tools and a different budget calendar, but the Commission preferred to go in a different direction. The Commission wanted an actual budget proposal document presented and they would work from there.

Sheila Danielson feels the final budget document will be a much better product than what was presented in the past. It will tell a better “story about Helena”.

Ben Kuiper- HCC Budget Committee asks about the Artisan Loan and if it is on time as written in 2005. Sheila D. replies yes it is on time and payments are coming in – any issues are being resolved. Ben K. also asks about Cares Act funding/spending. Sheila D. says the Commission gave feedback/approval on how to spend the Cares Act Savings. There currently is a balance of \$1.4m that has not yet been earmarked.

ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act of 2021) Funding was to be discussed at the April 28th meeting with a presentation by City Manager, but the meeting went long so it was delayed. Sheila D. has attended meetings with L&C County to jointly put together recommendations on how to spend the money in joint ways.

Ben K. brings up the Audit issue. Are there any negative findings? Sheila D. responds: The auditors don't necessarily look for fraud, they determine if the statements are fairly submitted and compliant. At this time, there is no evidence of a negative finding – it will be a review of internal papers.

Nancy Perry asks if the HCC will have already seen the budget before the May 12th budget discussion Admin. Meeting? Sheila D. responds yes and the presentation on the 12th will highlight changes from last year, capital highlights, operations within the city and addressing issues/operations that were negatively impacted by COVID.

Tim Chisman says he heard that the city was selling off underutilized properties and will this information be included in the budget? Sheila D. answers that most probably it will not be incorporated into the budget discussions – she is not quite sure.

Ryan Schwochert asks where Sheila worked previously. Sheila answers she was a Finance manager in the City of Port Townsend, WA, and accounting manager in Poulsbo, WA, and the Budget Director of a Community Hospital in Washington. Ryan S. asks if there is any way that HCC can assist Sheila. She responds she is always happy to respond to questions and talk with the public. Ryan S. asks what was her initial view of the Finance department? Sheila states that the operational issues were hard to understand. It is not her background to utilize some of the former processes within the department. Sheila D. wants to create solid financial policies. Many long-term former employees didn't write things down, so it is hard to follow what they did.

Ryan S. fully supports her idea of having more solid policies in place. Sheila says since there was no director for nearly two years, the employees in the Finance Department had to "wing it". Sheila D. states the employees now have solid, varied backgrounds in finance, accounting and budgeting. She feels with new policies and mentoring, the department will be fine. The draft budget that Sheila D. and City Manager Harlow-Shalk present will look very different than an earlier version circulating around.

Dylan K. wants clarification on the budget release timeline. Sheila D. states that the budget should be released by April 28th to be on the May 12th Admin. meeting agenda. Sheila states to feel free to reach out to her at anytime. Search for release on [BeHeardHelena](#) and on this site you can ask questions.

Dylan K. requests that all questions directed towards City of Helena department heads be given to Nancy Perry or Peggy Benkelman first, then they will forward the questions thru the City Manager.

HCC Budget Committee Report:

Budget Committee – Nancy Perry & Ben Kuiper – Nancy Perry thanks all the HCC members who researched/discovered information about various city departments. The information you forwarded to Nancy P and Ben K. will be very helpful in building the Budget recommendation document.

Nancy also commends all the Department Heads who were so very helpful and responsive as well. A big thanks to Police Chief Steve Hagan who explained in detail information regarding the School Resource Officer program and also gave data regarding deer collisions in Helena. Also, thanks goes out to David Knoepke (Transportation Director) who explained who owns the roads in Helena and provided a map. Parties that must maintain their roads could be Federal, State and City. Of course, City of Helena is responsible for maintaining its own roads. The HCC has suggested and provided recommendations in the past to actually re-build roads (because they are in such poor condition) vs. just performing the chip & seal. Sharon Haugan also reached out to Nancy P. saying she is ready and available to answer any questions. Nancy P. also wants to thank both Sheila Danielson and Rachel H-S for being so patient and helpful during this investigative process.

Nancy P. says both she and Ben K. have decided to utilize the same format for the HCC Budget document as last year. See Attached Preliminary document.

1.Intro paragraph, 2. Things to Consider – important issues w/example 3. Funds – goes through one fund at a time with specific recommendations. See list.

Ryan Schwochert mentions he does have information about the Golf Course and Muni's restaurant. Nancy P. replies she doesn't necessarily need specific numbers, just an overall report on how the course and restaurant has fared during the pandemic. Nancy P. asks Ryan to write up a recommendation.

Dylan K. says he just received an email regarding reach out to City Department Heads. We must go through the City Manager first as the Commissioners must be on the same info playing field as the HCC. If you need information, please reach out to Nancy, Dylan or Peggy and they can relay the question through the City Manager to the Department head.

Diana Hammer wants Dylan K. to double check about this requirement. She does speak with the Waste Water manager often because of the committees she serves on. Dylan K. will get verification on the matter.

Susan Steffens asks if the City of Helena runs Muni's restaurant? Dylan K. answers yes, the city does. The employees there are employees of the city. In 2020 Muni's needed a bail out from the city's General Fund. Ryan Schwochert states that Muni's is in much better financial shape now with income up 30% due to new chef from Carroll College, 4 different golf leagues with 150 members, use of simulators, e-sports event, live music.

Gary Dalton has gone to the golf course and seen a big increase in leagues, simulator use and use of the restaurant Muni's.

Denise Roth Barber – recalls the HCC talking about Muni's in regards to the budget last year, but she remembers that it was discussed as a positive revenue source. Dylan K. mentions he will look into the recommendation from last year.

Scheduling for the HCC's and the City's Upcoming Budget Meetings was discussed.

The schedule below was decided:

May 12 – Preliminary Budget is officially presented at Administrative Meeting by City Manager Rachel Harlow-Schalk and Finance Director Sheila Danileson

May 13 – HCC Official Meeting 7:00pm zoom – Rough Draft discussion

May 17 – Official Submittal of Preliminary Budget by city. HCC will share additional issues that need to be reviewed.

May 19 – Scheduled to be left open for more time for Commission review

May 20 – HCC Official Meeting 7:00pm Zoom - gives presentation of final budget document to the entire HCC. This is when the HCC will officially endorse the budget document which includes the HCC's recommendations to the city.

May 26 – HCC will present its official document to the Commission

May 31 – **Absolute last day to submit a comment about city budget** – Post publicly for Commission meeting for June 7th with Final 2022 Budget

June 7 – **Final Proposed 2022 Budget at Commission Meeting**

June 28 – Special Commission Meeting – Resolution Adopting FINAL 2022 Budget

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman - Continues to update webpage – stated vacancies in districts and encouraged people to apply – Openings in District 6 and District 2

Respond to emails and questions regarding HCC
HCC in need of new Secretary

Compiled minutes and agendas and posts them
Updates to HCC Facebook page
Attended Ex. Committee and Outreach Committee meetings
Helping with Budget Committee

Don't forgot to complete Candidate Filing Form – must be signed in front of a Notary and returned to the Elections office Rom 136 by June 21st before 5:00pm

Dylan K. reminds us that the Budget process this year is new with many new city employees, but he is confident they are moving us in the right direction.

Old Business: None shared this meeting.

New Business:

1. Discussion of open position of HCC Secretary (since Meg Bishop has resigned).
Job description will be sent out to all HCC members. Please tell Peggy or Dylan why you would like to be the Secretary. Filling the position is a semi-formal process. The Executive Committee will solicit interest and voting will most probably not be a closed Ballot. It will probably be a show of hands via zoom.

Committee Updates:

Outreach Committee – Diana Hammer – the committee has not met this month due to budget work.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – Weed control strategy, controlled burns, a formalized maintenance plan for trails, new pilot program to include trail-users input on a specific trail.

Civic Center – John Andrew - The Civic Center Steering Committee gave their presentation to the Commission which recommends the Civic Center operate as a non-profit 501(c)(3) – it can then receive more grant funding. The Mayor decided he wanted more input from the public and different groups and wants a Special Meeting to be held to further discuss.

Non-Motorized Transportation – Tom Woodgerd – A lot of discussion on side-walk projects. There is an issue with the trail from Benton Ave. to the Transfer Station – it gets too muddy – it needs to be paved. Broadwater School area needs bumpouts for kids to better access the school. Montana Ave. near the Capitol has had several serious accidents – there needs to be clearer pedestrian crossings around the Capitol. The 5 – point study (Malfunction Junction(s)) should add bumpouts at intersections for both pedestrians and bicyclists. Nancy Perry mentions she needs more information about sidewalks, could Tom W. forward that information to her.

Helena Public Arts Committee – Chelly Hasquet - there was no quorum, so the meeting only lasted about 5 minutes.

Citizens Conservation Board – Denise Roth-Barber – Denise mentions that there was an Op-Ed penned by Diana Hammer, there is a Water-Wise Workshop link, and also a link to a presentation by the Water Treatment Plant. Peggy B. copy those links from the Chat Room and send to all HCC members.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – This group will have a special meeting in May regarding budget. There have been several Legislative updates on Water quality. The USGIS station at Rimini is short on funds.

Ryan Schwochert – Bill Roberts Golf Course & Muni’s Restaurant - A new superintendent has been hired – Steve Link. There was damage on the course from the last major windstorm, but in 2021 they will not be replacing trees. Revenue in 2021 is up \$65K from 2020, with net income FY 2021 at \$392K (compared to \$301K in 2020). Income is up for both the golf course and Muni’s. Muni’s is re-branding as more of a sports bar to be enticing to the general public. It is more than a restaurant for golfers, Ryan encourages everyone to go there.

Future Topics – Discussion of use of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) and how they may relate to the City of Helena budget. Maybe HCC could give input on how to spend ARPA funds.

Steven Allen asks what the ARPA funds can be used for. Dylan K. replies, the Federal Guidelines have not been fully established, but the fund use must relate back to COVID 19 or health issues. A good example is water and sewer systems. Pot- holes is probably not a public health issue.

Diana Hammer would like to see the ARPA funds used to form a Regional Parks Authority to work with E. Helena and neighboring areas. Their work would include the Sports Complex.

June Meeting Topics –

HCC should work on some long-term work plan. Talk more about some hybrid of Zoom and in-person meetings.

Bob Habeck would also like HCC to work on some goals/work plan this year. Does HCC have a platform?

Dylan K. reminds HCC members to get their names on the ballot – deadline is June 21st.

Chelly Hasquet asks if the library is part of the city. Other HCC members reply that it is part of L&C County, but there could be commingled funding between the city and the county. Chelly recently visited the Library and said it was beautiful, but hardly anyone was there. Ryan S. says the library is still following a per person limit and also, a time limit to spend there. Steve Allen says he has seen ads on TV encouraging people to visit, yet the ads seem a bit off-putting. Steve agrees with Chelly and Ryan though, we should all go and see the newly refurbished building and support the local Library.

Dylan K. reminds HCC members to utilize the [BeHeardHelena](#) page to input your ideas and preferences.

Peggy B. asks that you please get your vaccines

Meeting was Adjourned at 8:52PM

Next Meetings are May 13th and May 20th at 7:00pm via Zoom – these meetings will relate mostly to budget discussions.

Below is a Sample of the HCC Budget Recomm. FY 2022

Last year’s HCC Budget Recommendation is here: from the HCC webpage https://www.helenacitizenscouncil.com/fileadmin/user_upload/HCC_FINAL_Review_and_Recommendations_RE_Fiscal_Year_2021_Preliminary_City_Budget_NP_.pdf

Draft - Sample

HCC Preliminary Summary Review and Recommendations to the

City of Helena Budget FY2022

Overall, the HCC recommends a short- and long-term future analysis of all funds (Enterprise, Special Revenue and General), especially due to the anticipated economic impacts of COVID-19. 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 revenue shortfalls could include: cutting costs, increasing revenue, 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 to engage in strategic planning regarding the city budget, including collaboration between the Commission, department heads, the new interim City Manager, and the public in consultation with city finance experts. 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 administration of city services.

Some things to consider:

1. The City has made every effort to continue to function throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly by use of on-line meetings, mandating masks in the City-County building, and working remotely by email or phone to provide non-essential services. Some facilities closed at the beginning of the fiscal year but are back open, with social distancing at parks and open spaces, food trucks, the Civic Center, and the Bill Robert's Golf Course and Muni's

restaurant. We will be feeling the effects of this pandemic for a while.

2. Reduced tourism means reduced city bed tax revenues.
3. The relationship between the Helena Airport Authority and the City of Helena needs to be thoroughly documented.
4. Revenue from City recreation facilities continues to suffer.
5. A major expense for Helena is road maintenance.
6. Helena should provide hiking trails for mobility challenged residents.
7. Improving Capital Transit signage and increasing routes would increase ridership.
8. Helena needs to resume culling the deer herd.
9. It is too soon to make a decision on maintaining the SRO program in the schools.
10. Helena should pursue building a third fire station.
11. Helena should facilitate construction of the proposed recreation and swim center.

Review and Recommendations by Fund Number

Fund # 542,543,546 - Solid Waste - The Helena Citizen Conservation Board has asked the City to allocate funding for a waste reduction strategic plan. The plan will focus on ways we (individuals, businesses, schools, organizations, public agencies) can 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.

Fund #211 – Civic Center

Fund #551 - Parking

Fund #522,532 - Water/Sewer Service Line

Fund #547 - Recycling

Fund #563 - Bill Roberts Golf Course and Muni's Restaurant

Special Revenue Funds

Fund #213 - Visitors Center

Fund #226 - Community Development

Fund #233 - Public Arts Project

Fund #237 - Urban Forestry Fund

Fund #238 - Loan Repayment Fund

Fund #260 - Fire Safety Levy Fund

General Fund

Fund 100-411 – Helena Citizens Council (HCC)

Fund #100-011 – General Government - HCC/HPAC Coordinator Position

100: Other Items:

Funding for the Housing Strategy and Transit Studies

Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC)

**Fund #406 - Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Railroad District and Fund #407
– TIF Downtown District**

Fund #440 - Capital Improvement Fund

Fund #450 - Sidewalk Improvements Fund

Fund #650 - Health & Safety Program