



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
June 22nd, 2022 7:00pm
Via Zoom and In Person Rm. 326

Meeting was called to order by HCC Chair Cole Rosling at 7:00pm

Attendance: Erick Seidle, John Andrew, Patricia Bik, Nancy Perry, Joe Lehman, Nolan Harris, Ben Kuiper, Lowell Chandler, Paige Myers, Margaret Strachan, Emily Mowers, Michael Monaco, Rachel Okapal, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert, TJ Lehman, Cole Rosling, Heidi Freidlander, Liz Maida-Gerhart, Susan Smith, Steve Allen, Denise Roth-Barber, Susan Steffens, Chelly Hasquet, Bob Habeck, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

Excused: Diana Hammer

Guests:, Dr. Thomas G

A Quorum was established - yes

Approval of May 2022 Minutes – A motion to approve the minutes was made No changes, objections or abstentions. All in favor. Minutes were approved.

Public Comment - Ryan Schwochert District #5 says *Growing Friends* <https://growingfriends.org/> of Helena would like each HCC District Rep to reach out to their constituents to see if anyone would like a tree planted on their property. The cost would be approximately \$50. Size and type of tree is yet to be determined. Planting would not occur until next spring, but contact Ryan at his email if you or someone you know is interested. His email is listed on our HCC Webpage and also on the HCC contact list that was emailed to you. TJ Lehman asked if this was for boulevard trees only? Ryan S. answered not sure, but a Growing Friends representative would be available to come onto the property.

Guest Speaker – John Campbell Helena Fire Chief – Chief Campbell explains they will be presenting their Master Plan in early July to the Commission. Chief Campbell mentions he would like a member of HCC to be on their planning committee.

Margaret Strachan asks about high grass level on the trails within the city. Chief Campbell replies that management of Open Lands falls to the City of Helena Parks Department. The Fire Department is ready to respond to an incident however, and they request that homeowners reduce the fuel around their homes.

Susan Smith asks if the Department is equipped with plans around Retirement Homes? For instance, around TouchMark? Chief Campbell says it is up to the individual building owners to create a plan. The Fire Department does do inspections on facilities with 4 or more units. They work with the owners to create safety plans through the Fire Prevention Bureau.

Ryan Schwochert asks where the 3rd Fire Station may be located? Chief John answers that has not yet been determined. An answer will be formulated with help from the newly formed committee working with the Fire Department. Chief Campbell mentions they would like to have a representative from HCC on that committee. Hopefully, the new facility will be on the other side of the railroad tracks but many factors come into play – land donations etc.

Ben Kuiper – asks what the plan is for funding the 3rd station? John Campbell says it is still in the conception phase. Most probably it will be a combination of grants, donations and other state and federal funding sources.

Margaret Strachan asks if the station will still be near the Airport? Chief Campbell says that is still a possibility.

Paige Myers wants to know if the Fire Department is having staffing issues? Chief Campbell says no, the Fire Department still has a competitive edge. He says they screen for College degrees and certain certifications. The applicants have been well qualified and are from Helena and outside of Helena.

Chief John Campbell asks that everyone review the Fire Safety and Evacuation plan on the City of Helena webpage. Peggy Benkelman mentions that she has posted it on the HCC Facebook page. Peggy will also send out a link to everyone.

Sheila Danielson – Finance Department Director

On June 27th the Final Preliminary Budget will be reviewed, amended and/or approved. After approval, the city can begin using funds. In August, a final assessment is performed, and in September, after the mil-levy is accepted in the State, the final budget is officially approved. The Finance Department has had to shift gears with the new Interim City Manager, Tim Burton. He is focusing on stabilization of the budget and fair pay and benefits for City Employees. The capital improvements plans are also being reviewed and how to distribute ARPA funds. Sheila D. compliments the HCC on their work to make recommendations to the budget. She is glad the HCC is so participatory. 2023 will have a tight budget this year. New staff have been needed and hired, however revenue flows have not kept up. Rate increases are in the works. A water and waste-water study has been implemented along with a rate study. Other areas where rate increases may happen are: Urban Forestry, Open Land, Park & Recreation Fees. The increase in fuel costs has impacted the city budget as well. Utilization of ARPA funds and how to distribute will be brought forward to the Commission in July. Updating the water facilities and our Parks, Recreation and Trail areas will be paramount.

Ben Kuiper asks if the ARPA funds roll out will be all at once? Sheila says that it will take 1 to 5 meetings to decide where the money will be spent. \$8.4M was allocated to the city of which \$1.8M has already been designated to Water Facilities. There is \$6.6m remaining and needs to have decisions made on where to use the funds. The Commission will most probably only consider “shovel ready” projects because the funds have to be used up in year 2023. Sheila D. also states that there are \$7.2M in State ARPA funds the city can use. The city will also apply for State Revolving Loans as a match to these funds. Some of these matching funds and loans will bring the water projects budgets to total around \$13M (this includes the \$1.8M already allocated).

Nolan Harris wants to thank Sheila for all of her support and hard work in putting together the city budget.

George McCauley – ADA Committee

George says he has lived in Helena for 30 years and has been an advocate for the handicapped and homeless for 52 years. George states that Helena is far behind the times in complying with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) regulations. He says the city is trying harder to work towards ADA compliance. George states a motion that he would like the HCC to accept: “To allow our 2 city-wide code enforcement officers to issue tickets for infractions of complaint driven ordinances”

George sites that sidewalk infractions are a major complaint – from snow removal, to parking on sidewalks, blocking sidewalks with hoses and extension chords etc. The *MyHelenaApp* newly put out by the city has helped log these complaints, but often nothing is done about them.

Paige Myers asks in regards to the motion – will it include how code enforcers will act. George M. is not sure – he says that David Knoepke (director of city Transportation) has said that first there is a warning then after that if no response, the offender has to pay a fine.

Margaret Strachan – asks about sidewalk bumps. Does the city have the authority to fine the homeowner? George M. does not know.

Margaret S. asks if George is asking the HCC to support his motion?

Bob Habeck suggests that first George pass the motion at his ADA meeting, the 3rd week in July, have it in writing, and then pass the motion to the HCC to discuss at the July HCC meeting.

Denise R. Barber and Rachel Okapal both think due to open meeting laws the motion should be openly discussed after being written up and reviewed by HCC members at the July meeting.

Nolan Harris – States being newly informed of the idea, he needs to see the motion in writing with defined language.

Paige Myers – questions the legality of making motions – it may infringe upon a person's right to make public comment.

Nolan Harris makes a motion to put George McCauley's ADA motion on the HCC July Agenda. Lowell Chandler seconds the motion. Chair Cole Rosling opens the floor for discussion. All are in favor except Margaret Strachan who abstains.

Margaret Strachan suggests we have a parliamentarian who knows all the rules and regulations for us to refer to. Peggy B. notes that the Clerk of Commission often fulfills that role.

Vote on New HCC Secretary

Chair Cole Rosling states since Mike Rooney resigned from the HCC, we are now in need of a new secretary. He explains the Secretary duties and opens the floor for any other person who may want to step up as Secretary or nominate anyone. There are none.

Diana Hammer is excused from the meeting and Patricia Bik speaks on her behalf.

Eric Seidle speaks as to why he wants to be the HCC Secretary. He states he has worked at the Capitol within the Legislative Branch, he has also worked in Communication Media with the Independent Record, he says he has a good working relationship with the HCC Ex. Committee. Eric States that members of the HCC should know the rules and procedures of the HCC and that the HCC should act as a governing body instead of an activist body.

Voting Procedure

The 10 HCC members present in room 326 are asked to go out into the hall and fill in their paper ballots. Bob Habeck oversees. He collects the ballots (folded for privacy) and brings them back into room 326. The 10 members remain in the hall while the Zoom participants vote via a poll. Both Peggy B. and Bob H watch for the polling votes to come in. Ryan Schwochert has left the zoom, so will not vote. The polling votes reflected 13 (thirteen) votes for Diana H. and zero (0) for Eric S. The paper votes reveal 4 (four) votes for Eric S. and 6 (six) votes for Diana H. The final total tabulation is 19 (nineteen) votes for Diana Hammer and 4 (four) votes for Eric Seidle.

Chair Cole Rosling announces the new HCC Secretary is Diana Hammer

Reports of Officers, Boards, & Standing Committees

Officer Reports:

Chair- Cole Rosling – Cole R. states he would still like to continue with the HCC Bylaw and Policy updates. He would like to have a committee formed. Bob Habeck is appointed chair of

the Bylaw and Policy Update Committee. Others who wish to be on the committee are Denise Roth-Barber, Dylan Klapmeier, Pat Bik, Margaret Strachan, Paige Myers.

Vice-Chair- Dylan Klapmeier – Nothing new to report

Treasurer-Nolan Harris – No new updates. He mentioned he is working with Peggy B. to determine balance of remaining funds FY2022.

Commission Attendees' Reports – One Minute

5/4 Nancy Perry 5/9 Nancy Perry 6/1 Nancy Perry

Nancy Perry mentions the May meetings entailed mostly budget discussion. She did mention to the Commission, the HCC Budget Recommendation and the Crossing light Recommendation. The Commission assured her they had the recommendations. The 6/1 meeting were mainly variance discussions with input from the public. The Rodney Street Phase II project was mentioned – interesting that there was only one bid on it.

5/18 Pat Bik – Budget Meeting discussions

5/23 Nolan Harris – Budget meetings discussions

6/6 John Andrew – Curb variances at Aspen Park, revisions of City employee Holidays, Use of Urban Renewal tax funds and the Preliminary Budget FY2023 was introduced.

6/15 Cole Rosling - most of meeting was in closed session with City Attorney. Cole R. was not made aware of what the session what about. Commissioners later made comments on the budget. Commissioner Dean suggested using Staff Drivers to help with DUI's. Commissioner Dean also wanted to see the outdoor Ice Rink come to fruition. Commissioner Feaver was interested in how and when the ARPA funds will be spent. He also mentioned the need for sidewalks around Broadwater School and Memorial park. Sean Logan wants to help with the staffing of the Police department.

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman mentions that the city may once again take away office space. She mentions she loves working virtually and doesn't need much space, but does want to be near the Clerk, Mayor's Office and the Commission in room 326. She may request a new laptop computer and cell phone for her use. Most of HCC concurs that there should be some sort of office presence on the 3rd floor of the City County Building. Maybe they will write a letter to the City Manager. The budget will be reviewed and it will be researched as to how/when to order a new laptop.

Committee Updates:

Outreach – Emily Mowers – Outreach Committee may order new vests. Margaret S. and Nancy P. did attend the Downtown Farmers market. They are looking into spending down remaining funds in the 2022 year budget.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – Open lands has been having field trips to Upper DeFord trail and Highland Park Trail in conjunction with PPLT (Prickly Pear Land Trust).

Civic Center – John Andrew – John will be joining the Non-Motorized Travel Committee for a walking audit around District #3 to see the impact of Civic Center.

HPAC – Eric Seidle – Eric stated he has not been attending the HPAC meetings. HCC Members should try to view some murals that are being placed on the side of Burdicks' Locksmith in District #6.

Non-Motorized Travel – Lowell Chandler says there has been progress on connecting the Centennial Trail – they have secured a right of way on Benton Ave. The Rodney St. Phase II is moving forward. There will be a walk-audit to gage access to the Great Northern and Civic Center areas.

Transp. Coordinating Committee – Joe Lehman – no meeting until next month

Water Quality – Diana Hammer – no report – she is absent

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth Barber – On July 7th the City will have a listening session regarding the Waste Reduction Program. HCC members should have already received the links to listen in.

Library Board – Paige Myers – The reciprocal borrowing program with Jefferson County was discussed. It seems the exchange rate is about the same. The library is looking for someone to purchase the Coffee Kiosk in the building. They hope to re-open it soon. There have been large numbers of books given away to make room for new programs.

Golf – Ryan Schwochert – unable to stay at meeting – left the zoom

New Business

New Topics for Discussion

Motion from George McCauley

New Recommendation from Lowell Chandler, Nolan Harris and Joe Lehman regarding Childcare regulations matchup with City Zoning and State regulations

Adjourn 9:07PM

Next Meeting July 27th on Zoom and in person Room 326