



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)

Minutes

March 23rd, 2022 7:00pm

Zoom - <https://zoom.us/j/92815557070>

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

Attendance: Eric Seidle, John Andrew, Diana Hammer, Patricia Bik, Nancy Perry, Joe Lehman, Mike Rooney, Nolan Harris, Lowell Chandler, Paige Myers, Margaret Strachan, Emily Mowers, Michael Monaco, Rachel Okapal, Dylan Klapmeier, Ryan Schwochert, TJ Lehman, Karen Wilson, Cole Rosling, Heidi Friedlander, Liz Gerhart, Susan Smith, Denise Roth-Barber, Susan Steffens, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

Excused: Ben Webster, Karen Wilson, Chelly Hasquet, Bob Habeck

Guests: Ron Bartsch, Derek Davis, Bekka Cantrell, Ben Kuiper, Forrest Zimmerman, Melanie Symons, Leandra MNA, Dr. Thomas G, Liz Ulrich, LC, Ed Santos, Pat Marron

A Quorum was established

Approval of February 2022 Minutes – A motion to approve the minutes was made by Lowell Chandler and seconded by Patricia Bik. No changes, objections or abstentions. All in favor. Minutes were approved.

Public Comment

Ron Bartsch and Derek Davis from Sussex construction speak regarding the Westside Woods Development. **Time limited to 10 minutes.**

Ron B. shares his screen on Zoom – he states that Sussex is trying to follow all State, Federal and Local standards for this development. He feels the city of Helena has not expanded much in the last ten years, it is appropriate that this development become a part of the city. Ron speaks about density in relation to the areas around the development. Ron says ¼ of the proposal will have walking trails. Derek Davis speaks on behalf of Sussex: he states the development was voted down due to variances. Actually, Derek says the development does not meet County variance issues. He also says that city staff supports the Westside Woods development. Derek feels the development follows the growth plan of the City of Helena. Ron B. states that Sussex construction has tried to meet with Save Helena Westside (SHW) recently but SHW would not allow Sussex's traffic specialist to meet with them due to legal issues. Ron B. says they are trying to reach out to SHW still. He also says that connecting to Highway 12 is not feasible because there is a big cliff there. Ron feels SHW is operating purely on emotion.

Next – 30 second Q&A.

Diana Hammer (HCC District #1) She states concerns about Traffic. How will Sussex secure access from the West? Could a utility corridor be used?

Ron B. replies no. The City does not have access as it is only an easement which is 20 feet wide (a road has to be 60 feet wide), also it doesn't fit the grade requirements, it is too steep.

Paige Myers (HCC District #3) – Paige asks if there are new roads to the south? Ron B. shares screen and says a new plan has been submitted to the city. There are now no roads over 600 ft in length, just more new roads that have a shorter length. The orange marks are trails. Ron says there is over a mile of trails within the development. All the streets will be named after local artists with areas for art installations as well.

Eric Seidle – (HCC District #1) What happens if Sussex Construction can't develop with the City's approval?

Derek Davis replies then the development would go through the County where there would be an establishment of a community waste water system and a lot of private wells. Derek feels it is a better deal to get approval from the city and then streets can get paved and sidewalks installed whereas the County has fewer development restrictions.

Ron B. reiterates that the County has fewer development restrictions. Ron B. believes strongly that their preference is to have the city annex Westside Woods development, he thinks it is ridiculous that the current Westside owners receive city services without paying taxes. (opinion – needs to be substantiated) Ron B. worries that in the future the city would change its mind and have to retrofit the area because they did not annex now.

Denis R. Barber – (HCC District #7) – The developments' proximity to open space puts it into a High Wildfire Danger Area. How does Sussex intend to have so many people be able to evacuate in a timely manner when/if an emergency does occur?

Ron B. states there are many access points available for evacuation. (where) He says the forests in the area need to be managed with fire mitigation efforts. Derek states that the fires would be mainly coming from the West and South, whereas the Westside Woods road exits are to the North and East.

Patricia Bik (HCC District #1) – Patricia B. asks if the County did proceed with this development (not the City) would the lots be as large and would the road plan be the same?

Ron B. replies that the road plan would be the same but with steeper grades and no sidewalks. The developer could obtain water rights and there could be a community waste-water treatment, new wells and/or centralized wells.

Diana Hammer (HCC District #1) – During the pre-app meeting on March 4th, issues were brought up by the city regarding 1. Street length, 2. Fire Danger 3. Engineering and Public works. How is Sussex addressing these issues that were brought up at this meeting?

Derek Davis replies that Essex is meeting with the City Planners and trying to work things out – Essex is trying to find out if the concerns are valid.

Below are comments from the Chat Room:

- **Diana Hammer**17:47

Thank you, Ron, and the Sussex Team. Representatives from District 1 have a couple of Qs: 1. District 1 has heard a lot of concern from residents regarding traffic concerns on Granite and Hauser and Knight. Please describe the results of your attempts to secure access to and from the proposed Subdivision to the west. Specifically, have you looked at the utility right-of-way that runs east-west through the corridor? 2. District 1 has also heard concerns regarding evacuation times in case of wildfire other emergencies. Have you studied the time that would be required to evacuate the proposed Subdivision with the most recent plat with cul-de-sacs and in the absence of a western egress? If so, what were the results and what was the reaction from Fire and other Emergency Services?

- **Edward Santos**33:15

The storage unit owner that borders the water line easement has stated that he would be willing to sell land to facilitate the road. Also My understanding is that SHW would be ok with the road going through the waterline easement

- **Denise M Roth Barber**36:18

The possibility of a wildfire in that area is extremely high. Since no additional roads will be built, getting residents out in a timely manner is concerning. How does Sussex address this concern?

- **Denise M Roth Barber**01:01:15

As part of the City's efforts to come up with a plan to reduce our City's waste by 50% by 2040, suggested waste reduction strategies were presented by the City's consulting company, Zero Waste Associates, at a public meeting last week, March 16th. These proposed strategies can be viewed at <https://beheardhelenahelena.com/strategic-plan-waste-reduction> If you haven't done so yet, please review and submit your responses to the proposed strategies.

Denise M Roth Barber01:02:41

In honor of World Water Day, the CCB's water committee submitted this great OpEd on how we can all reduce our own water consumption. If you didn't see it, it is here: https://helenair.com/opinion/columnists/world-water-day---to-water-to-life/article_889bb764-731c-5e74-a442-3a2f6129566e.html

Approval of February 2022 Minutes – Motion to approve minutes made by Lowell Chandler and seconded by Patricia Bik – no additions or changes. Minutes stand approved.

Chair Rosling wants to get more clarification about recommendations. The Executive Committee will look further into the Bylaws.

The HCC Ex. Committee also wants to meet with new interim city manager Tim Burton about the Neighborhood Captains idea that was previously presented by Rachel Harlow-Schalk.

Diana Hammer asks for the reasoning behind recommendation research. Cole R. replies That maybe it should be determined that a ¾ vote be secured to move a recommendation forward, instead of a simple majority.

Peggy B. speaks up – she says she doesn't think you can change voting, it is always a simple majority. She will check with the City Clerk and the City Attorney.

Dylan K. says he just wanted to make sure that recommendations follow the mission of the HCC in that they refer back to the city budget or the future growth of the city. Maybe they should have a more citywide touch.

Reports of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees:

Chair Cole Rosling – Cole R. states that the April HCC meeting will be a hybrid option in room 326 of the City/County Bldg. The April meeting will include Commissioners Logan and Dean if they are able to attend. May meeting may include the Police Chief and the June Meeting will include the Fire Chief.

Vice-Chair Dylan Klapmeier – Dylan thinks its time to “dust off” our bylaws. He asks that everyone look through them. If any HCC members have ideas about other advisory boards you would like to see HCC have voting rights on, please tell Peggy B. or our Chair Cole Rosling. It is unfortunate that the City Manager has resigned. Helena really needs a new Manager that will stay long-term. Tim Burton will be the new interim City Manager until a new manager is selected and hired. Dylan K. addresses HCC member decorum both electronically and in

person. Please review the HCC Guiding Principles document and avoid any personal attacks/comments about fellow HCC members.

Treasurer Nolan Harris – Not much to update on the timeline of budget meetings. The HCC is required to submit their preliminary budget to the Finance Department by March 31st. Nolan says he doesn't see too many changes to the HCC budget – maybe some increases for the Outreach Committee. Don't forget there are funds for neighborhood/District get-togethers. You can be reimbursed for food etc.

Secretary Mike Rooney – Mike will elaborate more under Committee Meetings about Outreach. Now he reminds members to please sign up to attend a Commission Meeting.

Commission Attendees' Reports: One minute

2/28 Diana Hammer – Diana thanked Commissioners for attending our HCC meeting. She said to the Commission that we look forward to having an interactive year with the Commission as we have a full board of 28 members.

3/9 Patricia Bik - The Commission mentioned they are reviewing the city's strategic plan because of upcoming difficult city budget issues. They reviewed the design of Custer Ave. as it will become 4 lanes. The Commission wants it to be compatible with the residential area with bike lanes, traffic calming, landscaping.

3/14 Joe Lehman – GoodFellow Poultry Processing was approved for industrial wastewater effluent – they are located off of Birdseye Rd. The teardown of the Memorial Park apartments was approved with help of city money.

2/23 Nancy Perry – The city BID (Business Improvement District) is trying to figure out ways to eliminate blight and perk up the look of the city. A new formula was presented but since it was assessed on all properties and the city owns many, the city expenses went way up. It was discussed to use ARPA funds in the amount of \$100,000+ for a new branding of the City of Helena.

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman – Peggy reminds members to sign up for Commission Meetings. Nancy Perry signs up for May 4 and May 9th. Cole R. may volunteer for the remainder of the June dates. Peggy B. says she continues to update the webpage and Facebook pages. She also completes the Agendas and Minutes, but now with Open Meeting laws she has to complete 4 sets instead of one. She reminds HCC members if they have a neighborhood get together, they can get reimbursed. Just be sure to forward your receipts to Peggy and Nolan. Please keep the expenses FY 2022 under \$50.

Committee Updates – 2 minutes

Outreach- Mike Rooney – Says the Water Bill insert is ready and will be in the May mailing. May 13th during the Artwalk, the HCC will have a table with interactive map from 4-8 pm in front of Ten-Mile Brewery. Please volunteer to be there for an hour or so. HCC will participate in the Farmers Market this year – only on the grass where it is free and one time per month. For next year's budget, there will be money allocated for Farmer's market \$250 and \$100 for Facebook boosts.

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman – New member Lindsay Gillstrap has joined HOLMAC. The committee is looking over the land maintenance plan for 2022. Some of the goals for this year include forest maintenance, Mt Helena north face fuel reduction, as well as fuel reduction (slash burning) on Mt Ascension. Of note, there are new Park Staff that patrol the trails weekly. There will be fence construction and removal on Highland Park. Weed maintenance and snow removal were also discussed. It is nice that the city leaves some snow on the LeGrande Cannon area for cross-country skiers.

Civic Center Steering Committee – John Andrew – John reminds us that there is still no official board for the Civic Center since it was dissolved. Mayor Collins and Kristi Ponozzo (Parks

Dept.) have re-joined the steering committee. Everyone is waiting for a decision on the new management of the Civic Center – non-profit and/or hybrid model.

HPAC – Eric Seidle – HPAC reviewed their final budget. They want to provide more traffic signal box covers primarily around schools. Eric liked the idea of having a 1% tax on new builds in our community and that money would go to public art projects.

Non-Motorized Travel – Lowell Chandler - Sounds like the city is moving forward with enhanced crosswalks at Jefferson school area. Lowell, along with District #2 Representative Nolan Harris would like the crosswalk to have a button. The crosswalks at Peosta and Hollins may have one of them removed which is contrary to safe crossings at schools.

Transportation Coordinating Committee – Joe Lehman – Joe (HCC District #2 Representative) expresses that he too would like to see the enhanced crosswalk at Jefferson. He would also like to have speed strips placed on Broadway and Montana Ave. Joe speaks to the expansion of Custer Avenue. He reminds us that these projects take a very long time to complete. Peggy Benkelman will send out the list of current projects.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer - As there was no meeting this month, they attended the Lake Helena Watershed Meeting. Concern over snowpack (our water source) at Ten Mile was only at 30%. They plan on providing a lot of water conservation education this year.

Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth-Barber - Please see links provided from the Chat Room (above). The City does now have a waste reduction goal, but they need a plan to reach that goal. You can contribute your ideas on Waste Reduction on the BeHeardHelena site via the City of Helena webpage. Denise mentions that the City of Helena also saved over \$600,000 last year because of its Green House Gas Reduction. So, it is not just about saving the earth, it also saves the city money. Please look for the Mayor's April Water Challenge and participate.

Other Non-voting Committees

Golf – Ryan Schwochert – There is a new golf pro, golf superintendent and food and beverage manager at Bill Robert's golf course. They still need a line cook. The finances are looking better. Ryan will know more after the next meeting. Cole Rosling also notes that Muni's Restaurant is a great space to rent out should you have an occasion to do so.

Denise Roth Barber asks about the space in Room 326 – if we would all fit. Peggy B. counted chairs around the big table and there is room for 20 and then 16 more chairs around the wall. We will see how crowded it is, hoping many will still attend via Zoom. If distancing is a concern, you are always welcome to wear a mask.

Heidi Friedlander mentions that the remaining District #6 members have appointed Steve Allen to fill the vacant spot.

Meeting Adjourned by Chair – Cole Rosling at 9:00PM

Next Meeting April 27th 7:00PM both live and on Zoom. Room 326 City County Bldg.