



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
Minutes
May 26th, 2022 7:00pm

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

Attendance: John Andrew, 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, Susan Smith, Steve Allen, Denise Roth-Barber, Susan Steffens, Chelly Hasquet, Bob Habeck, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

Excused: Eric Seidle, Margaret Strachan, Ben Webster (absent), Denise Roth Barber, Susan Steffens

Guests:, Dr. Thomas G, Emily Kittleson, Ben Kuiper

A Quorum was established

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

Public Comment -Dr. Thomas G respectfully asks that the HCC invite the Chair of the ADA committee to speak at our June or July meeting.

Cole Rosling opens discussion about **Recommendation by Lowell Chandler for the City to install two button crosswalks near Jefferson School**. HCC members were given this document to review before the meeting. Patricia Bik moved to approve the recommendation and Joe Lehman seconded. Cole then opened the motion for discussion. A vote was taken, all HCC members present at the meeting voted unanimously in favor of the recommendation, no abstentions.

Reports of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees:

Chair Cole Rosling –moved to next meeting

Vice-Chair Dylan Klapmeier – nothing new to report

Treasurer Nolan Harris – Nolan resided over this meeting as it was largely budget

Secretary Mike Rooney – nothing new to report

Commission Attendees' Reports: One minute moved to next meeting

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman – nothing new to report

Committee Updates – moved to next meeting

Outreach

HOLMAC – TJ Lehman –

Civic Center Steering Committee – John Andrew –

HPAC – Eric Seidle –
Non-Motorized Travel – Lowell Chandler
Transportation Coordinating Committee – Joe Lehman
Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer
Citizen Conservation Board – Denise Roth-Barber –
Golf – Ryan Schwochert –
Michael Monaco – Parks Department Meeting –

Paige Myers – Library Board report via email–

Reciprocal Borrowing with North Jefferson County.

of Jefferson coming to L&C: 280 (88 active)

of L&C coming to Jefferson: 181

L&C gets \$3995 from Jefferson residents (out of \$4,000,000 budget)

A temporary agreement has been reached. Program will start on July 1st and both libraries will study the effect of the program.

L&C suspects that it will save time due to staff not keeping track of our of town cards.

Library Service Report.

Attendance is down. Library suspects spring break, Easter, and 1 less day in April. Teen attendance was down the most. Library will start comparing attendance with pre-Covid years. Website hits were down. Study rooms were used 217 times over the month of April. Currently 100 reservations for them.

Once a place for it is found, starting a library of things.

Upgrading accounting software.

Laptops checked out 83 times. They have 6 and have room for 6 more.

Coffee kiosk in library is looking for a renter.

Library staff are able to stay on MMIA insurance.

Considering a new East Helena location. Looking at getting a lease from a local business.

Nolan Harris runs the meeting discussing the HCC Budget

The budget committee has put together a fair amount of information so far. The document will include Funds, Department Budgets and other special interest projects.

Michael Monaco – says the city is cutting 3.74% of budget and this, with a projected vacancy rate, will help fund the COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) at 5% for City Employees. Michael M. thinks this is a good incentive for employees, although it is only 5% and the County was able to have a COLA closer to 10%.

The General Fund had an increase of about 6.2% this year due to property taxes, vehicle charges and other fees. But, Capital projects went down by 8% and were not funded, so essentially the year broke even.

The City is developing a new Master Plan with the planning board meeting quarterly.

Emily Mowers asks about the \$6.6m in ARPA funds. Is it 6.6 or 4.2? Michael Monaco states that some ARPA funds have already been allocated, so that accounts for the difference.

Susan Smith – Susan S. asks about the Reserve Fund status? Nolan H. replies yes there is still a Reserve Fund, some is carry over and some is part of a contingency fund. Michael M. says it is the law that the city have at a minimum, at least 60 days in the Reserve Fund to cover expenses.

Michael M. – explains how the city cut two tiers of the health insurance plan. It was a beneficial both for the city and employees.

Nolan Harris discusses the HCC's Budget. He shows what the HCC submitted as their preferred budget. We did ask for more money under contracted services to have a more aggressive outreach but because of the City Manager Burton's request for cuts, we did have a cut of \$421.00 There may be some areas where we can move around money for forums and outreach. Peggy Benkelman mentions the new charge of \$948 dollars for a phone – seems excessive for one year. Peggy also mentions we should be careful to use it or lose it if we request funds and then never use them before the end of the fiscal year. Emily Mowers mentions in the State of Montana budgets, it is hard to move funding from one category to another, for instance moving money from personnel to an operating fund may require approval. Peggy B. does state the Clerk of Commission oversees our budget too, but Emily's questions are good ones and we can do some research.

Police Fund #012 – Nolan H. states this fund had no increase in budget, but they did move folks around to help with budget cuts. No change in public safety however. Staffing is a problem with 6 openings. They had requests for a laser mapping tool, drone, 4 patrol vehicles and a scanner. Actual approval and costs for items can be discussed at the May 31st HCC Budget meeting.

Municipal Court (a part of the Police Dept) – Nolan Harris explains: The Court is no longer paying for *Digitickets*, instead they want to purchase the printers for themselves. In the future, there may be a part-time judge moving into a full-time position. This position will be related to drug and alcohol charges.

Dylan Klapmeier says we should outline requests, but shouldn't be approving all of them, especially if the City doesn't have enough money to support all of them.

Fund #013 Fire – A new masterplan was completed along with *Communities in Crisis*. The department says it is having difficulties with the constraints placed upon them by the City Manager and having a balanced budget. Requests were: new station, new staff, training physicals, office space, new aerial machine, battalion vehicle, thermal imaging machine. Susan Smith asks about public safety coming first – how to balance all these requests? Nolan Harris said that is a good thought and something we could place in our budget summary. Nolan H. asks Susan Smith if she would send recommendation language to him.

Fund #014 Community Development – Some of this department's upcoming activities are: updating zoning ordinance, recreational marijuana, implementing the new growth policy, designs within 6th ward (xeriscaping vs. landscaping), *Trak-It* software training. This department also wants to work with adjacent jurisdictions e.g. County, receive paygrade increase to attract more staff, split cost of Historic Preservation Officer with the County and have a Housing Navigator thru Good Samaritan, Affordable housing fee waived at Tower Apts., and a capital request of a new vehicle.

Fund #017 Parks and Recreation – Nolan H. says the many requests can be seen on a screen shot he will provide for your review before the May 31st meeting. This department is trying to get their cost recovery up to 30% (currently it is less than 20%).

Fund #211 Civic Center - John Andrew speaks as a member of the steering committee. The civic center is slowly returning to normal after the Pandemic. John A. talked with Byron Dike (Civic Center manager) – Byron recently wrote a grant for Air Conditioning. The Civic Centers' dependence on General Fund help has been reduced by \$110K. The building could be better utilized in the warmer months with a better HVAC/AC unit. ARPA funds could be used here as HVAC could remove air-borne pathogens. The city still wants to own the building, but is considering having it run by a non-profit. Byron D. (manager) needs an advisory board if this is the case. In the past the advisory board raised money in the amount of \$25-75K per year. John Andrew suggests this matter get settled as it has been lingering for 2-3 years.

Michael Monaco says there has been a \$350K grant secured, and about \$80K from past fundraisers just sitting in an account. Probably the facility could set up a new HVAC in either the Ballroom or the Auditorium for a great start. Money could be paid back with the increase in events because of the air conditioning.

Fund #235 Open Space – There is a backlog of trails maintenance that needs to be done. It is expected to be completed in 2023. This city department did lose Federal Grant Funding this year. They expect to raise fees to cover this loss. Bob Habeck suggests it is a good idea to capture money from events held on our open space. There should, at the least, be a nominal fee charged, partner and secure grants with others, and L&C County residents that utilize these resources within the city need to pay their share to do so. TJ Lehman mentions that many of the events (especially mountain biking) have permit fees to participate. He may ask the Department about the fee structure they have in place and then notify Nolan Harris of amounts. Emily Mowers feels the park fees are pretty nominal and those fees could be raised.

Fund #237 Urban Forestry – The city is asking for a type 3 Wildland Fire Truck. The County has formed a mutual aid response. Urban forestry included boulevard maintenance of trees – it was earlier determined that there would be a \$1 tax on homeowners per year to care for this, however the funding is running out and will need to be re-authorized.

Fund #541 Public Works Department – This department is asking that the Sustainability position go to full time and that an additional \$40,000 be added to their budget to educate the public on how to reduce their waste.

Fund #563 Golf Course – This is an enterprise fund with year round potential with running, x-country skiing, dining etc. The golf course does do a good job of water conservation as they utilize ground water, not potable water, along with grey water from settling ponds to irrigate the course. Nolan H. says he would like to see the HCC approve the request for the Golf Course to take an Intercap Loan in the amount of \$195,000 to replace its current fleet of golf carts. The old carts are at the end of their life and can be purchased for \$100,000. The cost of the new fleet would be \$250,000. The course gets about \$150,000 per summer from cart rentals, so they feel they could pay the remainder of the loan in two summers. This is a time sensitive purchase so it behooves the Course to go ahead and make the purchase.

Bill Roberts still struggles a bit to finance the debt from Muni's. They feel it would be helpful if there were full time staff member(s) who would then have the advantage of health insurance on the City's plan with benefits.

Susan Smith says it is hard to compare golf carts to purchasing police cars. Public safety should be the most important. Nolan H. says the funding for the carts comes from a different funding mechanism so the two can't be compared.

Dylan Klapmeier wonders if the idea of concessioning-out Muni's restaurant came up this year as it did last year? HCC members that listened in on meetings didn't hear anything about that.

Facilities – Diana Hammer suggests that the HCC continue to promote that the city water parks with groundwater (wells) instead of using water purified for drinking. She also suggests that all city facilities should be Water Wise and also utilize xeriscaping at facilities as they did at the new Law & Justice Center.

Fund #521 – Diana Hammer says the waste-water treatment plants should continue being optimized by saving water and lowering the chemical use. HCC should support these optimizations. HCC should also support the use of ARPA funds to take mine waste out of Ten-Mile Creek. Upper Hale and West Main updates should be supported with ARPA funds too. The

city should promote water conservation to its residents and educate them. The city should also be a supportive partner to the CCB (Citizen Conservation Board).

Nolan Harris asks if there are any other topics/questions HCC members may have. He states the report (recommendation) will focus on the larger department budgets.

Peggy B reminds members that the meeting on the 31st is at 6:00pm.

Meeting Officially Adjourned by Chair – Cole Rosling at 9:07PM

Next Meeting May 31st at 6:00PM Zoom only.