



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)

Minutes

October 25th, 2023, 7-9PM
Room 326 or via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by Chair Ben Kuiper at 7:05PM

Attendance: John E Andrew, John R. Andrew, Nancy Perry, Joe Lehman, Ben Kuiper, Lowell Chandler, Paige Myers, Emily Mowers, Bob Schlack, Rick Boleware, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth Barber, Susan Steffens, Chelly Hasquet, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

Excused: Diana Hammer, Patricia Bik, Steve Allen, Erinn Donnell, Nolan Harris, Ryan Schwochert

Absent: Heidi Friedlander, Margaret Strachan

Guests – Craig Marr (Parks Dept), Michael Alvarez (Planning Dept), Magda Kintzing (public member), Dylan Klapmeier (public member), Dr. Gregory Thomas (public member), Reese – Boy Scout (public member)

A Quorum was established – yes

Approval of September 2023 Minutes – Motion to approve the minutes from the September HCC full board meeting was made by Lowell Chandler, seconded by John R. Andrew. Chair Ben Kuiper asks if there are any changes or updates to the minutes. All HCC members were in favor of current minutes. Minutes were approved.

Public Comment – none

Chair Ben Kuiper recognizes Boy Scout, Reese, from East Valley Middle School.

Guest Speakers –

Craig Marr (Parks Department) The City Parks Department is responsible for 35 public parks, some of which are Memorial Park, the Pool, Pedestrian Mall and Sports Fields.

There are 70 acres of irrigation, 175 acres of turf and 14 playgrounds we care for.

Maintenance of the Pool includes testing and chemical balance of chlorine etc.

Kindrick Legion field has a well there that needs to be maintained. There are several Ice Rinks that the Parks Department maintains. We utilize a handmade Zamboni. It is often hard to get the ice established properly. The Parks Dept. also maintains asphalt parking lots, including striping.

New playgrounds at Leo Pocha Clinic and Memorial Park are being established and maintained.

The Department also designed and built new picnic shelters. There are new wells at various parks that need to be maintained – this has helped the Department to use less City water for irrigation. The Parks Department mows 5 days per week.

Weed control per MCA (Montana Code Annotated) says it is unlawful to let noxious weeds propagate. Craig M. states that only certified staff can apply chemical agents and they closely follow directions to do so. The Parks department does use biological controls such as insects. Mechanical control of weeds is done by hand pulling and mowing. Chemical control is often used as a last resort. Chemicals are not used around playgrounds, dog parks, picnic areas, volleyball areas, small parks, and areas with standing water. Chemicals are sprayed on larger sports fields and some wildland grass areas. The Parks Department concentrates on removing several types of weeds: Whitetop, Spotted Knapweed, Toadflax, Leafy Spurge, Canadian Thistle.

Because of some recent complaints, the City Parks Department has decided to increase staff requirements: making sure that employees are state credentialed and properly updated/trained to apply chemicals and, even though it is not required by law, to post information about where and when chemicals are applied to areas. The Parks Department will try to post signage in advance of spraying chemicals. Craig M. feels the small little flags companies use, sometimes are not that noticeable and often people don't take the time to read signs. Hardships for keeping parks managed are: increase in population creating more stressors on parks, more races/events, more people from outside the city limits utilizing parks (but they don't have pay into city taxes), aging infrastructures and conflicting priorities (for example: many want dandelions removed, while others feel they are good for pollinators).

Denise Roth Barber: Denise mentions an incident when she parked near the Civic Center tennis courts. She parked on the street. Her car got watered at 5:00PM. She feels Parks should take into account the time of day they water and where the sprinklers are watering (not in the street). Also, maybe Parks should consider not having so many lawns and let fields go more wild. Both these ideas could conserve water, time, and money.

Bob Schlack- asks why the parking lot near NW Park (Capital High) on the South Side of Brady is locked. Craig Marr says that kids were parking their cars there during school hours. They are working on a solution.

Magda Kintzing (member of the public) tells Craig Marr she was one of the persons making a complaint. She wonders why the Parks webpage says spraying is largely done from May thru June, yet she saw spraying done in late July. Craig M. responds that it often depends on the weed and the weather. Craig M. had commented that once the chemical dries, it is not toxic. Magda K. asks: what happens if someone walks on it when it is wet? – it is hard to control when people are out walking. Magda also states that dogs eat grass, are the chemicals safe for dogs? Craig Marr says he doesn't know, it also depends on the type of chemical used.

Lowell Chandler – reports that he did some research on MCA (Montana Codes Annotated), and the State leaves it up to the local authorities as to when they will notify of chemical spraying - in advance, during and after spraying.

Craig Marr – thinks this is a good idea and will work on a policy to post signage.

Lowell Chandler may put together a recommendation to forward to the Commission regarding this subject. Craig Marr agrees it is a good idea.

John R. Andrew mentions the use of "highlight". A substance when added to the insecticides and herbicides, makes the grass area where it is sprayed, have a fluorescent sheen. John also thinks applications should be made during the night.

Michael Alvarez (Planning Department)

The City of Helena needs a rewrite of its Sign Code. There has not been an update for 25 years. Signage needs to reflect current technology. Signs also need to be more legible, there needs to be scaling for Wall Signs and the code should reflect what is going on in the city. Currently the Planning Department is working with local sign professionals. There are some ideas about sunsetting all Billboards within the city in 10 years. At times there are issues with Electronic Signs affecting neighbors with adjacent properties. Issues include lighting and flashing. Michael says the Planning Department is looking for the public's input. Please go to <https://beheardhelena.com/> and complete the survey.

Ben Kuiper asks if the topic will be brought up at the next Zoning meeting?

Michael A. replies not at the November meeting. They are still gathering public input and there will be a big work session at the December meeting with a possible Commission vote in January.

Officer Reports

Chair Ben Kuiper – Ben Kuiper welcomes Boy Scout Reese from East Valley Middle School. Ben K also mentions he met with Commissioner Sean Logan and they discussed how the HCC could better communicate with the Commission as a whole. Commissioner Emily Dean says the

Commission needs information in their packet (NOVUS) before the Commission meeting, so that they may review it beforehand. Ben K. thinks this may be problematic as we only meet once per month and we don't always have an official recommendation to offer.

It was decided that the HCC won't make applicant recommendations at this meeting, they will wait until the November 15th meeting – then the soonest new HCC applicants can be approved by the Commission will be December 4th.

Vice-Chair – Lowell Chandler – Lowell C. has spoken with David Knoepke (Transportation Dept) regarding a flashing beacon on Benton, Stewart, and Hauser Streets. David K. reports they are examining the crosswalks at those locations. The Benton crosswalk is an MDT (Montana Dept. of Transportation) street so approval has to come from them. Lowell also researched Safe Routes to Schools and Billings has an exemplary plan – we may want to copy theirs. They have routes mapped for every school. No further comments regarding the Strategic Plan document, so Chair Ben K. moves to discuss more at next meeting.

Treasurer Report – Nolan Harris – Excused, so no report.

Secretary Report – Diana Hammer –Excused. Chair Ben Kuiper did share Diana Hammer's two documents: Strategic Planning Priority Discussion and Policy for HCC to interact with other organizations (see below)

Unfinished Business:

Strategic Planning Priorities - No further comments other than Lowell Chandler's comments about the Safe Routes to Schools and mimicking the Billings plan. Chair Ben K. moves to discuss further at next meeting.

HCC Policy for Interactions with Other Organizations – the language was amended by those at the October 25th meeting to reflect paragraph below:

In order for the HCC Body, a Neighborhood District(s), or an individual HCC representative acting in official capacity, to participate in an event or volunteer opportunity with a local organization, the organization must meet the following criteria: non-profit, non-partisan, secular, and be adding value to or otherwise benefiting the Helena community.

It will be decided later as to where to place the document, either in the HCC Bylaws or the Purpose & Guiding Principles.

New Business:

January 2024 meeting location will be decided upon soon.

HCC applicant approval process – motion to delay approval until November 15th made by Lowell Chandler, seconded by Rick Boleware. No further comments or discussion, all members were in favor, none opposed. Chair Ben Kuiper says motion carried. Applicant approval will be at the November 15th meeting (soonest the Commission can approve them is at the December 4th Commission Meeting).

Commission Attendees' Reports – two minutes

10/11 Meeting Cancelled

10/16 Susan Steffens – There will be a new roof put on the Justice Bldg., Commission wants to hire a facilitator to help move ideas along with the Housing Authority, City Attorney says there will be no limit on Drag Shows, City Mgr. Burton says the food program is a success, the Commission mentioned it would like the HCC's "notes" in advance of their meetings and have them appear in their packets, ARPA money was released for the Helena Sports Complex, but the Mayor asks why it is taking so long to release the other money to organizations. DES wants to enhance 911 calls – needs \$40K to do so. Need for curb variance on Hauser & Elizabeth

streets and sidewalk improvements /remodel needed on Jerome and Hauser. Parklet fees will be \$75 per space per month.

10/25 Nancy Perry (in place of Ryan Schwochert) - The mayor listed appointees to various boards. The Homeless problem within the city was discussed. No permanent ideas were had as to where people could go. Under consideration were, *Our Place* – could house 25 people upstairs, *God's Love* – they may open earlier and stay open later. No place will cook food on site. LDS offered furniture. Some discussion was had about tiny homes and large tents. Discussions will continue into January.

Lowell Chandler asks about using vacant city properties or storefronts - just for a warming place at night. Nancy Perry didn't hear that mentioned.

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman – Peggy mentions that she still needs to have volunteers to attend Commission meetings on Dec. 4 (Rick Boleware agrees), Dec. 13th (Nancy Perry agrees) Dec. 27th date is still open. HCC Full Board Meeting for November will be on November 15th. – 7-9PM in person room 326 or via Zoom.

Denise R. Barber asks about having information forwarded to the person who will be attending the next Commission meeting. For example, she will attend October 30th – is there time for her to receive the newest updates/report/minutes? Denise wonders if we should scale back on our number of meetings with the Commission per month.

Lowell Chandler doesn't want to give up the HCC spots on the Commission agendas. Maybe instead of having reps at 4 meetings per month, we should just have reports at 2 Commission meetings per month. Is the Commission requesting our Minutes? Or just recommendations?

Outreach Committee Report – Emily Mowers – HCC will be attending the Fall Artwalk on November 11th. She has created a LinkedIn account. Please like and join our Social Media platforms.

Boards, & Standing Committees

City-County Consolidated Planning Board – John E. Andrew – Amendments were made to subdivision requirements/reviews. A new ordinance was established for minor subdivisions. There is a new Land Use Planning Board. This has to be fully established and running by 2025. Helena Public Arts Committee – Paige Myers – HPAC will have more dumpster art, there was a call for artists for the Lyndale Tunnel, there will be more traffic signal box covers and hopefully the Band Shell at Memorial Park will get re-painted.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Lowell Chandler – Street width is still being discussed. In Bozeman, local arterials look at the entire width of the road instead of lane width. This may be a good solution to follow.

L&C County Water Quality Protection District Board - Diana Hammer – excused so no report.

Citizen Conservation Board – Diana Hammer – excused so no report

Solid Waste Master Plan Meetings – Denise Roth Barber – No contact from them. They are not meeting currently.

City- County Library Board – Paige Myers - Still having many indoor activities. Paige could not attend due to illness.

Golf Advisory Board – Bob Schlack – The Golf Board established no more than two unexcused absences, or you will be removed from the board. They accepted and approved their new Bylaws. The Golf Course Fund was discussed. Terms of Office were established.

City-County Consolidated Parks Board – Ben Kuiper – The Parks Board did not meet in October.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund Advisory Board – open for an HCC member to attend. No one attended to report.

Downtown BID – open for an HCC member to attend. No one attended to report.

Chair Ben Kuiper – makes one more call for public comment, there was none.

Paige Myers motions for meeting to be adjourned, Lowell Chandler seconds. All were in favor.
Chair Ben Kuiper says meeting is adjourned.

1:43:18 PM Meeting Adjourned

Next HCC Full Board Meeting is scheduled for November 15th, in Room 326 or via Zoom.