



**Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)  
Minutes  
November 20th, 2019 7:00pm  
City/County Building - Room 326**

**Members Present:** A quorum was present (7 members from 4 different districts = quorum)

District 1: John Andrew, Patricia Christian, Marie Stump  
District 2: Meg Bishop, Nancy Perry, Susan Lenard, Nick Sovner  
District 3: Sumner Sharpe, Margaret Strachan, Gary Dalton  
District 4: Douglas Hunsaker, Dylan Klapmeier, Tom Woodgerd  
District 5: Shannon Stevens, TJ Lehman  
District 6: Ben Kennedy, Whitney Bausch  
District 7: Dick Sloan, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth Barber, Doris Davis

**Other Attendees:** Tom Stoops, Ryan Leland (City Engineer), Dianne Hammer (Dist. 1), Mary Ann George (Dist. 1), Paul Cartwright (Growing Friends) Bob Throssell (Growing Friends).

**Call to order:** HCC Chair, Sumner Sharpe called the meeting to order 7:00pm

**Introduction of Guests:** Tom Stoops, Ryan Leland, Dianne Hammer, Mary Ann George, Paul Cartwright, Bob Throssell.

**Approval of October 23 2019 HCC meeting minutes**

Pat Christian asked that the wording "Continuum of Care" be removed so as not to create confusion. Minutes unanimously approved with change.

**Coordinator's report: Peggy Benkelman**

Voter information has been removed from the Webpage. Peggy helped tabulate and phone write-in voters. Performed outreach to possible guest speakers. Setting calendar dates for 2020. Starting to compile new welcome packets. Performing normal office duties of both HCC and HPAC.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Transition Streets in "Bentonia"** - Diana Hammer & Mary Ann George

Transition Streets was piloted by Diana Hammer with about 50 of her neighbors. The Handbook includes a series of 7 meetings. Topics included in the Handbook: Getting Started, Energy, Water, Food, Waste, Transportation and What's Next. This was a great way to engage neighbors. Usually there were about 20 in attendance. Many brought knowledge and skills to

the table to share with other neighbors. It was a challenge to get people together. The Transition Streets program incorporated a lot of information for people to process. Bentonina focused on waste/recycling. One of their next steps was to develop a “Tool Directory”, so neighbors could share tools. [www.transitionstreets.org](http://www.transitionstreets.org) does provide a handbook at a cost of \$20. Both Diana Hammer and Mary Ann George would be happy to speak to your neighborhood group should your district want to get the process started.

**Growing Friends** – Project Proposal, Emerald Ash borer -Robert (Bob) Throssell

Bob Throssell, chair of Growing Friends, <https://growingfriends.org/> Stated Growing Friends was putting together a project/policy proposal. It would be great to filter it through the HCC then to the city of Helena. More information can be found on the website: [www.emeraldashborer.info](http://www.emeraldashborer.info) The Emerald Ash borer came from Asia. It spread through the Midwestern US quickly. In Helena, 55% of the tree canopy is Ash, so it may be prudent to remove trees before they are infested. There may be a discount if larger quantities are involved. There is an insecticide that is effective against the borer, but costly at \$250 or more per tree. Growing Friends is leery of Biological control because they are unsure of overall effect it could have on other insect species and plants.

Growing Friends has 3 programs: Grants (approx. \$3000), Boulevard Tree program, Funding of tree planting at schools. Chris Daly (Helena City Arborist) is doing a good job of planning a variety of trees. Growing Friends like to plant Linden, Maples and Elm. They charge \$50 to plant a tree, but that includes “sweat equity” from the property owner. City ordinances do not allow for conifer/evergreen plantings – the trees just become too large. Donations to Growing Friends can be received at the above website. It was suggested that maybe the state could discourage out of state firewood hauling.

**Public Works Projects** - Ryan Leland, City Engineer.

Ryan provided a 3-page handout with city projects that are completed, in-progress, in-design and for the future. City completed the \$4m project on W. Main. Neil St. x Fuller is 99% complete, Fee St is under completion, 10 Mile transmission main is completed, and Rodney and Knight streets are under design. \$12m spent on completed projects, \$16m under construction, \$16m in-design and \$8m slated for future projects. There are Urban Renewal Districts and maybe someone from HCC would like to sit on the advisory board for them. If so, please contact the City Manager. An HCC member commented on the safety for non-motorized traffic groups. Traffic calming should be a consideration. To utilize old sewer and storm-water run-off pipes, city engineers were able to use a resin-filled sock to extend the life and usage of these old large city pipes. Sidewalks are the adjacent property owner’s responsibility for installation and upkeep. Ryan mentioned if there are future projects that your district needs or wants to hear more about, please contact him.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Nominating Committee - Bob Habeck**

A Nominating Committee with a Chair will be appointed. It was suggested by HCC members that the Nominating Committee be comprised of Margaret Strachan, Doug Hunsaker and Bob Habeck with Bob serving as the chair.

**Motion** - a motion was made to accept the Nominating Committee persons. No comments, none opposed, none abstained. Motion accepted.

The Nominating Committee will pole people who may want to serve on the Executive Committee. Job descriptions for Chair, Vice- Chair, Secretary and Treasurer were handed out. Soon HCC members will be receiving phone calls from those on the Nominating Committee.

#### **Street Lighting Update: John Andrew**

The lighting project was halted July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. See Memo hand-out provided to HCC members. *If the desire of the Commission is to maintain the current ordinance language, the only option for NorthWest Energy is to install Cobrahead lights. There is a desire for this project to continue.* NorthWest Energy will be attending a retreat with City Manager Ana Cortez. It seems everyone is coming closer to a positive dialogue.

#### **Growth Policy Update: Dick Sloan**

The most current version of the City Growth Policy

<https://www.helenamt.gov/government/departments/community-development/planning/long-range-planning>

The City has done an excellent job of incorporating public comments/requests. The plan also includes specific action items. There is more emphasis on implementation with steps to complete goals.

#### **Budget Update – Quarterly Report- Dick Sloan**

City charter states one of main functions of HCC is to give input to the Commission on the city budget. Dick Sloan provided HCC members with a 4-page budget document to refer to during his presentation. When comparing expenditures by department, you can see that in 2018-19 there was a 13% increase, in 2019-20 there will be a 14% increase and in 2020-21 there will be an 8% increase. How does the city pay for these increases? Most probably by taxes: land, sewer/water, gas. The HCC provided specific comments to the Commission in relation to this two-year budget (2020-2021). The document is on file in the HCC office. The city has increased or intends to increase its number of FTE (Full Time Employees) by about 20 persons. Most new hires will be in Transportation services. The HCC should be aware of these increases and at the same time review the City's intention of man-power reduction. Debt Services (the interest the city is paying on borrowed money) is going up. In past years, debt services was usually about \$1M, but according to the budget, by the end of June 2021, Debt Services will be around \$3.65M. This is a key item, HCC should keep their eyes on. Often cities borrow money to complete projects in a more-timely manner, but the amounts borrowed that increase the debt load should be closely monitored.

#### **City Advisory Boards Updates – Sumner Sharpe**

Sumner and Peggy attended the Listening Session regarding City Advisory Boards on November 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Listening Session was intending to concentrate on Open Space, Parks & Rec Advisory Councils and the Civic Center Board.

An HCC member said when government talks of being efficient, it means “getting rid of it”. Combining all the advisory boards may not be the best because they all have such different functions. Don’t allow money to be taken away from citizen participation in government.

An HCC member felt the listening session was frustrating. No one was there from the Commission to tell the public what the problems are with the advisory boards.

Please fill out the [www.Surveymonkey.com/r/CityBoards](http://www.Surveymonkey.com/r/CityBoards) or send your letter of opinion to the City Clerks’ office.

Margaret Strachan emphasized the importance of Office Help for both HCC and HPAC. Both these council/committees serve an important function to the city. Peggy works minimal hours to complete the functions required for both positions. HCC has many more members and HPAC is creating more projects, which means more office coordination/time. The HCC is a great value to the city of Helena.

**9:00 pm – Chair Sumner Sharpe Adjourned the meeting.**

**Next Meeting is January 22<sup>nd</sup>, room 326, 6:30– 9:00pm**