



**Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)
MINUTES
June 26th, 2019 7:00pm
City/County Building - Room 326**

Members Present: A quorum was present

District 1: Eric Seidle, John Andrew

District 2: Meg Bishop, Nancy Perry, Susan Lenard, Nick Sovner

District 3: Sumner Sharpe, Gary Dalton, Margaret Strachan,

District 4: Doug Hunsaker, Dylan Klapmeier

District 5:

District 6:

District 7: Bob Habeck, Dick Sloan, Doris Davis

Other Attendees: Ana Cortez - City Manager, Kali Wicks - City Commissioner, Thomas Jodoin - City Attorney, Steve Hagan – Interim Chief of Police, Ben Kennedy – District #6. Mark Bostrom, Melissa Schaar.

Members Excused/Absent: Flannery Herbert, Tom Woodgerd, Whitney Bausch, Denise Roth-Barber

Call To Order: Chairman Sharpe called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Summner reminded everyone to please take the Growth Policy door hangers packet of 20 – start hanging them after the 4th of July, the 6,7,8th of July would be great.

City Manager's Report: First time there is a bi-annual budget, and it is balanced for FY 2020 – 2021. This includes increases in services and new positions, including a new Housing Navigator position, a new Open Space/Land Management Plan, and updates on Chapters of City Code. With the new addition of 74 acres adjacent to LeGrande Cannon Blvd, many of the new Land Management plans will be re-structured. Twenty-one Percent of budget will be in reserve while keeping a floor of \$1m for Fund Balance. A \$10.50 increase in rates is proposed while also improving services. A Public Information Officer has been hired, so our community engagement will be more consistent; and a paper submitted by several HCC members will be used as a blueprint on engaging the community, incusing plans to go to the citizens/neighborhoods, in addition to City events . The city is developing and working the downtown community to help with improvements. A new intern has been hired to interview the community about what they want in regards to the downtown area. The city is designing a new website that is easier for the public to utilize. The city is also updating social media standards. There will be new allocations for downtown, and new code enforcement (e.g. snow removal). She asked that if a person hears rumors regarding our community, please contact the City Manager's office and ask for clarification and facts.

Discussion: A new position entitled Sustainability Innovation Resiliency Officer (SIRO) has been funded with half the salary from the County and half the salary from the City. Resiliency includes how Helena responds to Fire and Floods and Earthquakes

Margaret Strachan (HCC member) expressed concern about removal of city trees in District 3. While she understands the necessity (because of disease), her neighbors wished the approach, dates of removal, and timing, would have been made more clear especially with noise and street closures. She suggested that a Street Tree Committee formed to advise on informing and working with citizens in affected neighborhoods as the effort proceeds. City Manager Cortez said her suggestions will be considered. A second City Arborist will soon be hired.

Coordinator's Report: Peggy Benkelman reported on what was completed this month:

- Display board in lobby of City-County Bldg. The display will be updated quarterly.
- Growth Policy door-hanger flyers readied for HCC members to distribute.
- New rack card brochure printed and handed out.
- Website updates: candidate filing information, agendas posted, Esri Map updates, June 2019 Survey results posted, Helena Growth Policy posted.
- Peggy Benkelman's office hours will now change to mornings 8:00am – 12:00 Monday thru Wednesday and 8:00am – 11:00am Thursdays.

Approve May Minutes: Sumner Sharpe asked if there are any changes or additions to the May Minutes? Minutes stand as submitted – approved.

Guest Speaker Commissioner Kali Wicks: Kali Wicks says she appreciates all the HCC does. It is an honor to serve and looks forward to the input from HCC.

Her main priorities are:

Transparency, Public Information Officer position/input, Website updates, Increased Social Media engagement, Economic Development (especially downtown), Affordable Housing (subsidized housing), Open Lands (trails, parks and how they play into the Economic Development of the City), Public Health and Recycling.

Discussion:

- Sumner Sharpe - would like to see the City website more easily display agendas for HCC and also have help from the city for more Commission and HCC meeting notices in the Independent Record.
- Meg Bishop – while she supports Tourism and the income it brings to the city, it can contribute to the non-affordable housing issue.
- Margaret Strachan also brought up the high suicide rate in Montana. CM Cortez said there is a county program for suicide prevention and that the city is conducting suicide awareness training workshops.
- The city is also encouraging developers to work with the city on low-income housing.
- CM Cortez also says that a current inventory of vacant land within the city has been established.
- Gary Dalton says that Helena is unique because people from surrounding areas (county) utilize city services daily. Maybe there is a way to increase the cities' tax base by starting some sort of user fees.
- Sumner Sharpe suggested that City street standards/improvements/rebuild vs. maintenance may be a good discussion for the July HCC meeting. He explained that many of the streets may need to be rebuilt, not just paved over and drainage improvements and sidewalks need to be considered as well.
- Susan Lenard handed out pictures of road erosion on Beattie Street. She would like to see this issue addressed.

Presentation and Discussion: Abandoned Vehicles and Parking for Camping with Speakers: City Attorney Thomas Jodoin and Police Chief Steve Hagan

Steve Hagan: He has been coming to meetings regarding this issue for ten plus years. The Police Department tries to quickly respond to complaints made about abandoned vehicles. Citizens must call and report vehicles, for the police to respond. The Department does not have enough manpower or time to patrol the streets checking on abandoned vehicles. On an average month there are about 40 calls, however last winter, there were 120 calls in one month. Most cars are not truly “abandoned”. It usually takes from about 8 days to 2 weeks to get a car moved. The main problem is the City Police lot to store these cars is very limited in size (about 15 cars), so there is no place to store them. It may be best to have a private company take care of housing and towing and collecting the fee for abandoned cars. It may be beneficial to move away from the term abandoned. There are definite limits on the storage of vehicles. There are differences between the terms abandoned and junk vehicles; and the County deals with junk vehicles.

Thomas Jodoin: In the 9th Circuit Court of Boise, an opinion was established, that “criminalizing” the act of camping in one’s car violates the 8th amendment (Cruel and Unusual Punishment). Officers have to follow certain steps to get a car moved. Calling a car on the street abandoned is problematic to the public. They (the public) still see a vehicle has value even if they move it only two times per year to go the dump for example. Fining people \$40 for \$700 worth of attorney and court fees is not cost effective, especially when people won’t (or can’t) pay and people will not show up for a court date. Courts can still regulate car camping in terms of sewage and noise complaints. Tom reiterated that there is no place to store or tow abandoned/junk vehicle. Boats, trailers and campers can be towed from November 1st through April 15th. The city’s next steps are to propose changes to ordinances – the City of Helena has this planned. City Codes 8-11-1 and 8-11-10 are still viable.

The HCC recommends that 2 or 3 people craft a letter to the Commission with recommendations on how to move the issue forward.

Public Comment: City of Helena citizens: Melissa Schaar and Mark Bostrom discussed issues with people living in cars outside their homes on Butte and Logan streets. Their concerns were for their neighborhood and safety of children playing in their neighborhood. They felt it violated noise and health considerations. Drug and alcohol abuse was an evident problem as well. The 9th Circuit Court of Boise case resulted in the prohibition of moving people living in cars if: they have no location to go to, if they are there involuntarily, if they are indigent persons struggling to survive.

In regards to the vehicle parked on Butte Ave: it was eventually towed because it was a non-running vehicle and a public nuisance.

Budget Report: Dick Sloan – Dick Sloan presented the HCC with handouts on the General Fund: reserve, restricted funds, new initiatives and fees. These handouts also included information on the Enterprise Fund which includes new employee positions and initiatives. The city did an excellent job with balancing the General Fund. There are basically two funds – the General Fund and the Enterprise Fund. By 2020, the city will have to support 19+ new employee positions (included in the Enterprise Fund). A possible rate increase coupled with increased taxes of \$10.50 may have to be incorporated to fund all of this.

Next Meeting: July 24th, 2019

Meeting Adjourned at 9:07