



Helena Citizens' Council
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Date: July 17, 2017
To: Helena City Commission
From: Helena Citizens' Council
Subject: 2018 Helena City Budget

The Helena Citizens' Council (HCC) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the 2018 budget for the City of Helena. The City Manager, the city staff, and the City Commission have been very helpful and supportive during the budget review.

The HCC supports the 2018 Helena budget, which was recently approved by the Helena City Commission.

The HCC does have some specific concerns/comments/ questions on the approved 2018 budget that can be summarized as follows:

1. HCC endorses Helena's continued support of Historic Preservation, the Humane Society, the Community Services program, the Friends of Pets program, and the joint 911 system.
2. The increase in city staff of 11 fte's for 2018 appears reasonable and justified.
3. HCC is concerned about the continuing trend in the June 30th cash balance over the recent several years. The predicted June 30, 2018 cash balance is about \$18,000,000 less than the cash balance on June 30, 2016.
4. HCC supports the efforts to attract major businesses to replace Blue Cross/Blue Shield, New West, and Independent Record in the downtown area.
5. The police fire, and parks capital programs appear to be reasonable and justified.
6. The proposed 2018 HCC budget provides adequate funding to focus on important city issues.
7. The projected 3.9% increase in medical/dental insurance costs for 2018 seems low.
8. The focus of the police department programs appears to be adequate.
9. HCC supports the fire department's efforts to increase the number of personnel assigned to suppression.
10. HCC questions the costs for consultants to study zoning issues, long-term housing needs, and infrastructure. City staff should be able to complete the needed studies.
11. HCC questions the need for parking fee increases when the current fees are adequate to cover the parking system costs.
12. HCC supports a 3-5 year program to actively promote both the Civic Center ballroom and the auditorium venues.
13. HCC questions the use of city financial resources to cover the proposed golf course \$1.8 million upgrade. The city should consider sale of the golf course to encourage private development and to increase the city tax base.

14. The city staff should be able to develop a parks plan; it should not be necessary to hire a parks planning consultant.
15. The 2017 Urban forests contracted services is projected to cost \$1,276,391, and \$81,355 is proposed for 2018. HCC is concerned that contracted services are being under budgeted for 2018.
16. The total estimated cost for the 5-year capital infrastructure program (streets, potable water supply, water treatment, storm water) is about \$115 million. The city needs to objectively evaluate the scope and schedule for some of the high cost items; there is potential to spread some of the items out an additional 5 years or more.

C: City Manager