



Helena Citizens' Council (HCC)

## Minutes

November 15th, 2023, 7-9PM  
Room 326 or via Zoom

### **Meeting was called to order by Chair Ben Kuiper at 7:03PM**

**Attendance:** John E Andrew, John R. Andrew, Pat Bik, Diana Hammer, Joe Lehman, Ben Kuiper, Nolan Harris, Lowell Chandler, Paige Myers, Emily Mowers, Bob Schlack, Rick Boleware, Steve Allen, Denise Roth Barber, Susan Steffens, Chelly Hasquet, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

**Excused:** Nancy Perry, Ryan Schwochert, Margaret Strachan, Bob Habeck

**Absent:** Heidi Friedlander, Erinn Donnell

**Guests** – Elbert Hernandez (Catalyst Foundation), Magda Kintzing (member of public), Ann Hausrath (member of the public)

### **A Quorum was established – yes**

**Approval of October 2023 Minutes** – Motion to approve the minutes from the October HCC full board meeting was made by Lowell Chandler, seconded by Steve Allen. 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 – Elbert Hernandez (Catalyst Foundation) speaks.** This is a new non-profit formed to reduce recidivism and homelessness. It is a two-year program where parolees abide by probation and parole expectations while becoming productive members of society. Violent and sex offenders will not be considered for this program. The idea is to build tiny homes that are about 500-600 square feet. Catalyst Foundation would like to utilize *Montana Sheds* to build the homes. It is a Montana based company. Cost would be approximated \$14-15K per structure. Elbert has been in contact with the Department of Corrections – they prefer some sort of “kit” for an easier build. The Catalyst Foundation has contacted Habitat for Humanity, Salvation Army, Home Depot, Lowes, and Power Townsend to form partnerships for grants and receive donations. Most likely the tiny homes will be built on land within the City Limits, and probably about 4 per neighborhood. They are still having discussions with the City about location and approval. The utilities will be connected to the city utilities. The Foundation may also work with a Solar Company to offset costs.

**Steve Allen HCC District #6** asks if they have considered using Tough Sheds? Elbert H. replies they are too expensive.

**Paige Myers District #3** asks if the Catalyst Foundation has received any pushback from the public? Elbert H. says no not yet – but the Catalyst Foundation is relatively newly formed. They will address public concerns first and foremost.

**Emily Mowers** asks if you are putting tiny homes on public land? Elbert says that is what they are working towards. The kind of people they will be housing are prisoners, sober living individuals, and pre-release persons. Elbert H. wants prisoners to have a more specialized screening process. He is working with the Department of Corrections (Scott Eichner) on this process.

Susan Steffens asks about what kind of supervision will the people have? Elbert H. answers if they are on probation or parolee, it will be detailed supervision. As far as others, that supervision has not yet been determined, it depends on a variety of other factors.

Bob Schlack asks if they have worked with Golden Triangle. It seems Golden Triangle is no longer in existence. Emily Mowers says most pre-release persons work with Boyd Andrew Center.

Lowell Chandler asks if Elbert H. has looked into Conestoga Huts out of Oregon? Elbert H. says they may be only for transitional structure.

Anne Hausrath – public member of District #2 asks if the HCC will do any public outreach before the review of City Government in June of 2024. She is a member of the League of Women Voters. Also, she asks if any Districts are planning any upcoming events. Emily Mowers responds that no, not yet. The HCC is in transition mode with upcoming new members for 2024/2025 and will address new functions in January.

### **Guest Speakers – none**

### **HCC to review and approve HCC Applications for term 2024-2025**

**23:02** Chair Ben Kuiper says that the HCC may approve applicants as an entire slate or discuss and approve individually.

**23:36** Diana Hammer makes a motion to approve as a slate. Lowell Chandler seconds the motion.

**24:10** Chair Ben Kuiper opens the floor for discussion.

Lowell Chandler says he feels it is a great slate of candidates. Emily Mowers is happy to see a person from District #6 has applied.

**25:01** Chair says all in favor – all members present vote Aye. None opposed.

**Motion passes.**

### **Officer Reports**

Chair Ben Kuiper – Ben K. reports he is still working on how the HCC can better communicate/report to the Commission.

Vice-Chair – Lowell Chandler – Lowell C. says he would like to establish some sort of flow chart with the Commission. It would include how the HCC's recommendations would/ should be responded to – possibly with pictures.

Treasurer Report – Nolan Harris – Nolan has nothing new to report – only about the reimbursement to Peggy Benkelman for display materials in the amount of \$51.00. A total of \$111.00 has been spent so far in fiscal year 2024.

Secretary Report – Diana Hammer – Diana H. defers to Emily Mowers with the Outreach Committee Report

### **Unfinished Business:**

**Strategic Planning Priorities** – will be moved to the January meeting after election of officers.

**HCC Policy for Interactions with Other Organizations** – the language was amended by those at the October 25<sup>th</sup> meeting.

John R. Andrew would like to add after **criteria: the wording governmental entity.**

**36:41** John makes a **motion** to add this language. Diana Hammer seconds the motion

**38:06** Chair Ben Kuiper **calls for a vote to add the wording governmental entity**. In a verbal vote, all HCC members approve. Motion passes. Paragraph now reads:

*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: be a governmental entity, have non-profit status, be non-partisan, secular, and be adding value to or otherwise benefiting the Helena community.*

Where to place the document?

The new paragraph will be placed in the Purpose and Guiding Principles area 2.6 under a newly created subsection 6.

**38:40 Motion** made by Diana Hammer to approve new paragraph and approval of where to place it in the document *Purpose and Guiding Principles*. Susan Steffens seconds the motion. Chair Ben Kuiper calls all in favor – none opposed. **Motion passes**.

### **New Business:**

January 2024 meeting location will be decided upon soon – either Civic Center or Commission Chambers. Swearing In of Members and Election of Officers. It will be an in person ONLY meeting.

### Establish Nominating Committee:

Committee will be composed of: Denise Roth Barber, Paige Myers (chair), Susan Steffens, Pat Bik

**43:39** Budget priorities, process and budget philosophies FY2025. Encourage HCC members to follow specific Departments and their requests. Official Budget Discussions begin on April 3. Chair Ben K. suggests that the HCC get involved with the budget as early as possible. The HCC needs to have a new Treasurer asap.

Emily Mowers – says we should start in January and reach out to all Department Heads as soon as possible asking for what their requests may be, (not including the usual overhead of FTE requirements etc.).

Diana Hammer - Diana suggests that the HCC coordinate those contact calls so Department Heads don't get inundated with calls.

HCC District Members will be assigned Departments.

Denise Roth Barber suggests that members select budget categories to follow and find information.

John E. Andrew – remembers when HCC members could sit in on open meeting budget discussions, that would be great to be able to do so again.

Let's invite the City Manager to our meeting in January says Diana Hammer and Pat Bik.

Pat Bik says let's get the open communication flowing with the City Manager.

John R. Andrew would like to review the City of Helena flowchart. Rick Boleware would like to see our previous recommendations. Denise Roth Barber suggests that the HCC have Department Heads speak at each meeting.

Growing Friends along with HCC for Community Outreach – Diana Hammer of HCC District #1 met with members of Growing Friends and they would very much like to partner with HCC within individual Districts. They are looking for places to plant more trees. The Urban Forestry Department of the City has taken over with the removal of Ash Trees and planting other trees in their spots. Maybe different HCC Districts could plan for Growing Friends to do some plantings in public areas.

**59:17 Recommendation on Chemical Spraying on Helena's Parks –** Chair Ben Kuiper asks the coordinator to bring the document onto the zoom screen for consideration. All members had received this document in advance of the meeting.

**1:00:00 HCC member Lowell Chandler makes a motion to approve the recommendation as written** this includes a 1. A review of pesticide/herbicide use, 2. City to enact an ordinance 3. Alternative to ordinance: policy to notify the public of application.

**1:01:08 John R. Andrew seconds the motion**

**Floor is open for deliberations** - Lowell Chandler mentions that in each HCC member's packet there is a note about recommendations and it includes having findings to back up your recommendation.

**1:06:32 Lowell Chandler explains the reasons for the recommendation.** He says a concerned citizen noticed spraying of chemicals near children and near the dog park. There were no signs stating chemicals were being applied to the area. This citizen came to speak at the HCC's October meeting after hearing no response from the City regarding her concerns. Craig Marr (of the Parks Department) came to speak at the HCC meeting in October and said the city and department had heard of the complaint and they were working on better notification and training for persons applying the chemicals.

Lowell Chandler says timing and consistency of applications was researched along with Craig Marr's recommendation that he is supportive of the ordinance.

**1:10:00 Steve Allen** remarks on the line "to identify a less harmful alternative". Steve suggests using the language "identify **and use** a less harmful alternative".

Pat Bik – recommends not being too direct to the Commission. She said we should "urge" them to take action.

Lowell Chandler responds that the HCC is just a recommendation body and this is a conversation starter. He feels it is best to be straight forward with the Commission.

Rick Boleware agrees with Lowell Chandler's point.

Denise R. Barber supports the idea of having a very specific detailed recommendation.

John R Andrew appreciates the work that went into the recommendation. He and Pat Bik had crafted a less lengthy letter. John R. Andrew feels the biggest problem was that there was no notification of chemical spraying to the public. John questions whether an ordinance is in order. Maybe HCC shouldn't be specifying timelines for applications, that is the work of the Parks Department, Wildlands Department and Transportation Department.

Lowell Chandler responds that in his research he finds notification laws and ordinances are all over the country and in Montana. He has full confidence that Helena can figure out and use such ordinances/laws.

Diana Hammer says that the cover letter of the recommendation with the findings attached makes it easily digestible. It is important to Helenans to have notification of chemical spraying and to use less harmful/toxic applications.

Magda Kintzing (member of the public) states that you all (the HCC) walk on eggshells with the government. Nobody from the city ever responded to her many phone calls and emails, only the HCC took on this issue. Magda reminds us the City works for us! The wrong person sprayed the chemicals and possibly was not certified to do so. This is the time to be very direct to the Commission and get a safe change made.

Anne Hausrath (member of the public) seconds what Magda has to say. She thinks the HCC has a great opportunity here to make positive change in Helena.

**1:40:49 Move to amend the language** and use Steve Allens' suggestion of "identify and use" under #2.

**1:42:57 Chair Ben Kuiper calls for a verbal roll call vote. 13 Aye and 1 Nay.**

**1:44:30 Motion Passes for the Pesticide Notification and Contamination Prevention Recommendation.**

### **Commission Attendees' Reports – two minutes**

10/30 Denise Roth Barber was unable to attend.

11/6 Nancy Perry was excused from the meeting, so no report.

11/15 John E. Andrew – there was discussion about General Fund Savings. Memorial Park and the Sidewalk Loan program discussion will be put on hold. The DUI task force requested an intern for the summer. There are over 6000 unpaid parking tickets – in lieu of paying them, the Transportation Department may ask for food donations. City Engineers are still discussing street and parking widths. The Golf Course is having a fundraiser for routing drinking water to drinking stations throughout the course, the cost will be \$30 – 35K There was also a request to make a 10-foot strip of land near the bowling alley into a city park.

**Coordinator Report –** Peggy Benkelman – Peggy mentions that she still needs to have volunteers to attend Commission meetings:

12/27 – John R. Andrew volunteers

1/8 – Diana Hammer

1/17- Emily Mowers

1/22 – Ben Kuiper

Peggy B. also thanks those HCC members who attended the Board Training last week.

Reminder of no December meeting. Next HCC Meeting is January 24<sup>th</sup> 7:00PM in the Commission Chambers and it is in person only.

Denise Roth Barber suggests in January, the HCC should re-think attending 4 Commission meetings per month. Chair Kuiper says he will place this idea on the agenda.

**Outreach Committee Report** – Emily Mowers – Artwalk was well attended. They had many interactions with a younger crowd from Districts 5,6,7.

### **Boards, & Standing Committees**

City-County Consolidated Planning Board – John E. Andrew – No meeting in November. John did ask Troy Sampson about the new HVAC system for the Civic Center. Troy says it is still moving forward. City of Helena did create the new Planning Commission (MPO). We are waiting to hear who the representatives will be.

Helena Public Arts Committee – Paige Myers – there are two Community Collaboration Grants, one for \$1000 and one for \$5000. Open call for Dumpster Mural Artists. The spring Artwalk dates will be either May 3 or May 10.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Lowell Chandler – there still is a lot of concern about the width of travel lanes. The speed bump on Neil Ave. has been removed. A new 15 MPH sign was placed in the School Zone near Helena Middle School.

L&C County Water Quality Protection District Board - Diana Hammer – meeting had technical difficulties, so Diana dropped off the Zoom.

Citizen Conservation Board – Diana Hammer – New action plan for the City that will correlate with the State plan and help with eligibility for funding.

Solid Waste Master Plan Meetings – Denise Roth Barber – Denise forwarded the presentation to all HCC members. The city is considering having a new Transfer Station and also considering the sub-option of curbside recycling.

City- County Library Board – Paige Myers - no meeting, however the library has great rooms to reserve for meetings and parties.

Golf Advisory Board – Bob Schlack – The Golf Board meets next Tuesday.

City-County Consolidated Parks Board – Ben Kuiper – Mostly talked about County Issues.

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.

John R. Andrew motions for meeting to be adjourned, and Rick Boleware seconds the motion.

**2:07:50 PM Meeting Adjourned**

**Next HCC Full Board Meeting is scheduled for January 24<sup>th</sup> 7:00PM in the Commission Chambers – IN PERSON ONLY.**