



State of the City Address

Mayor Wilmot Collins - January 9, 2023

Distinguished guests, Commissioners, Members of the Executive Branch,
Good evening and welcome to the annual State of the City Address. The City Charter States:

“The mayor shall communicate to the city commission and to the general public, a statement of the affairs and management of the city, each January, and may make recommendations regarding these matters.”

Our City Charter was adopted in 1976 and it states, “Helena, Montana, is the proud seat of our state government. It is a community with a colorful past and a vibrant future, there is an openness and basic decency that beckons each of our citizens to contribute to its unique identity.”

This beautiful city is governed by a diverse, hard-working city commission. I want to thank and recognize all city employees for all they’ve done to contribute to the success of this city, thank you on behalf of the commission.

The city commission and city staff are two parts that make the city what it is; however, we could not accomplish all we do without the various advisory boards. I want to recognize the members of the various advisory boards; they give hundreds of hours of free time to make this City run. We thank you. I also want to especially recognize the members of the Helena Citizens’ Council. This City Commission sincerely appreciates all your hard work.

In addition to the efforts of all who work within the City organization, the City values those who work tirelessly to make our Community grow. It is time we acknowledge the fact that Helena has a thriving business community, therefore, we must suppose those policies and initiatives that will continue to develop a strong and diverse economy.

It is very important that we recognize the day-to-day work of the City and not take it for granted. We’ve continued to deliver essential services to our community of Helena: plowing the streets, fixing potholes, responding to emergency calls, patrolling the community, collecting garbage, etc. However, I also want to recognize several accomplishments from 2022:

Tonight, I would like to share with you the accomplishments achieved despite the many challenges of 2022. As well as the ongoing projects the City government is implementing to realize the Commission's Strategic Outcomes in 2023.

City Manager's Office

2022 Accomplishments

- The City Manager's Office was focused on stabilizing City Operations in 2022.
- The Interim City Manager presented the Commission with a balanced FY2023 budget that focused on employees, providing a significant cost of living adjustment to boost recruitment and retention.
- The Interim City Manager hired the new Chief of Police, City Attorney, Community Development Director, and Parks, Recreation, and Open Lands Director.
- The City Manager's Office also established a new Grants Administrator position to support the Commission and City Departments in exploring new funding opportunities.
- Under guidance of the City Manager's Office, the City presented the Commission with a complete review of each department's Capital Improvement Plans.
- The City Manager's Office also developed a structured, deliberate, transparent process for allocating ARPA funds.

2023 Goals

- In 2023, the City Manager's Office will focus on continuing to stabilize City operations by providing consistent direction with clear priorities.
- The Office will also manage the process for allocating the City's remaining \$2.7 million in ARPA funds.

City Attorney

2022 Accomplishments

- The City Attorney's Office, with new leadership, continues to provide the City with legal and administrative support for research, advice, and policy level opinions, where requested, in addition to providing prosecution and victim services for residents.

- Implemented a new software provider to streamline and improve prosecution and victim services for an eventual paperless criminal justice system.
- Implemented new processes within the City to more efficiently review and issue various permits required for special events, subdivision, construction, etc.
- Implemented a code revision process to update outdated Helena City Code working with City Directors to ensure all Code is up to date and useful.

2023 Goals

- This year the City Attorney's Office will continue to review City Attorney's Office records for archiving historical documents.
- Continue to work toward fully reviewing the Helena City Code for updates and revisions and updates.
- Additionally, the City Attorney's Office will grow staff to provide the support necessary for the increasing demands that a growing population creates.

Community Development

2022 Accomplishments

- The City took important steps with new housing programs through its Community Development Department, including launching the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.
- The Community Development team also supported the first Home Renewal Program project, which helps fund health and safety related home renovations for low-income households.
- The Community Development Department granted a building fee waiver of approximately \$30k for costs associated with rehabilitating 44 units affordable to community members at or below 60% area median income
- The City supported and was awarded a CDBG grant to fund the rehabilitation of the Helena YWCA building
- Construction in Helena continued at a fast pace, with over 2,700 building-related permits issues.
- City staff also completed over 4,700 building inspections in 2022.
- The City's Planning Division moved forward important updates to Helena's Zoning Regulations, Land Use Table and Definitions.

- Work began on a neighborhood plan for the 6th Ward/Railroad District, which is expected to be complete in 2023.
- City staff also collaborated with the Lewis and Clark County planning team on Urban Zoning and Infrastructure Standards

2023 Goals

- The City will continue its efforts to support affordable housing initiatives. Staff hope to complete another Home Renewal Program project, while providing the first funding from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.
- The Community Development Department hopes to create a basic local Housing Assessment that can be conducted on an annual basis
- Additional work will be done on Zoning and Subdivision Regulations Review to include Development Review Processes, Signs, Parking, Landscaping, Recreational Marijuana, Zoning Categories, and Dimensional Standards

Facilities

2022 Accomplishments

- The Facilities Department accomplished several projects on City-owned properties, including adding four additional services windows for the County Motor Vehicle Department.
- Several capital improvement projects were identified and will be funded with a portion of the ARPA funds the city received. Some notable projects include roof replacement at the Grand Street Theatre and installation of an air-conditioning system at the Civic Center.

2023 Goals

- In 2023, the Facilities team will be busy upgrading several City facilities, including:
 - Replacement of the Civic Center auditorium roof.
 - Replacement of the Fleet Maintenance shop heating system and roof.
 - Replacement of the Main Fire Station boiler and air-handler.

Finance

2022 Accomplishments

- The City's Finance Department was busy in 2022, refining the annual budget development process.
- The City received its 33rd consecutive GFOA Certificate of Achievement Award for its Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. This award represents months of collaborative teamwork of the entire staff in the Finance Department and partnering with all divisions of the city to collect necessary data that is accurate and timely.
- The Finance team has been working to improve customer service efforts through several initiatives, including:
 - Processing electronic payments for eligible vendors.
 - Improving our cash receipting processes.
 - Streamlining and digitizing Liability Claims, Property Claims and Incident Reports.
 - Refining Utility billing, collections, and licensing processes.

2023 Goals

- Finance continues to lead the city-wide software replacement project, with implementation kicking off this month. This process will be critical for improving efficiencies and modernizing customer service across the City.

Fire

2022 Accomplishments

- The Helena Fire Department was incredibly busy in 2022, responding to over 4,700 calls, which is up from 4,200 calls in 2021. The department managed record call volumes despite dealing with several injuries and retirements throughout the year.
- The Fire Department's new Fire Inspector position has been instrumental in instituting the Inspection Reports Online program, allowing staff to monitor detection and suppression systems in Helena's commercial and business occupancies.
- In addition to its response efforts, the Fire Department also completed its Master Plan. The document is being utilized to create short-, medium-, and long-term work plans for the department.
- Mount Helena Fire in August
- July Flood

- Asphalt section of Front Street between W 14th St and W 15th St was damaged due to flooding during a rainstorm on July 4, 2022.

2023 Goals

- The Fire Department Planning Committee is working on an executive summary of the Master Plan and will provide those findings to the Commission in the coming months.
- The Fire Department's wildland firefighting capabilities and need for a breathing air compressor will rise to priorities in the Capital Improvement Plan as the budget process continues to develop.
- Helena Fire Department will continue to seek out grant funding and other revenue opportunities to meet our ever-increasing costs and needs.

Human Resources

2022 Accomplishments

- The Human Resources Department was busy in 2022, supporting the City's employee recruitment and retention efforts. Some of the critical employee focused initiatives include:
 - Starting the process of creating a market-based pay plan to help the City become more competitive in the long term.
 - Implementing more competitive, employee medical insurance plans, which resulted in significant cost savings for employees who need coverage for spouses and dependents.
- The HR team organized several supervisory training sessions, providing valuable development for employees across the City's various departments.

2023 Goals

- In 2023, the Human Resources Department will continue leading the development of a market-based pay plan with the goal of updating the City's pay-matrix.

Municipal Court

2022 Accomplishments

- The City's Municipal Court was focused on continuing to improve its processes in 2022, while facilitating nearly 4,000 trials.

- The Court implemented a check in process for defendants struggling to comply/complete sentencing
- Judge Peterson and Nikki Johnson attended Rural Court Conference in Anaheim, California, which focused on making rural court available and accessible to all parties.

2023 Goals

- In 2023, Municipal Court will focus on continuing to provide efficient, effective and impartial services through initiatives like:
 - Continued digitization of court documents
 - Completing installation of Full Court Enterprise through Supreme Court

Parks, Recreation and Open Lands

2022 Accomplishments

Parks

- The City's Parks division completed several improvement projects, including at the Pedestrian Mall, Kindrick Field, and the Memorial Park playground.
- Staff also completed a massive renovation project at Barney Park, which included new tennis and pickle ball courts, and basketball court.
- The City continued work at the Fire Tower with contractors completing plans for reconstruction and developing a list of needed materials for restoration.

Civic Center

- The Civic Center made great strides in returning to normal operation, welcoming nearly 75,000 visitors for events, with almost 100 different events hosted in 2022.

Recreation

- The City's Recreation Division continued offering its many popular public services in 2022. Some of the City's Recreation highlights include:

- Hosting over 22,000 visitors Last Chance Splash and Pool, with over 1,100 kids taking swimming lessons.
- Over 5,000 people used the outdoor ice rink, including several ice skating and curling classes for the community.
- The Kays Kids program was successful in providing free programs and activities for 80 plus children per day throughout the summer.

Urban Forestry

- The Urban Forestry team was busy in 2022, maintaining trees throughout the City.
- A \$10,000 grant was awarded to Urban Forestry to support tree species diversification.
- As a result of the Urban Forestry's ongoing work, over 40 cords of wood was donated to Helena's Low Income Energy Assistance Program.
- City staff also assisted Helena Growing Friends with the Benton Avenue tree planting project, which resulted in beautiful new trees lining the path on the west of Bill Roberts Golf Course.

Golf Course

- Bill Roberts Golf Course experienced a busy 2022 season, between golf leagues and tournaments, cross-country running meets, cross-country skiing, and even a disc golf.
- The Golf Course overcame several challenges at Muni's Restaurant, such as staffing, to build solid momentum by the end of the year. Throughout the fall and start of winter, the golf simulators in Muni's have been busy.
- The Junior Program at Bill Roberts had over 70 participants, which was an increase of 20 kids from 2021.
- Additionally, Bill Roberts is proud to support a number of important community programs:
 - The golf course supports Special Olympics Training for athletes wanting to pursue golf.
 - Bill Roberts hosted its first free golf clinic for underprivileged kids in honor of Wayne Helmbrecht. The clinic was attended by 21 participants.
 - The Golf Course is also the site for the Disabled American Veterans Golf tournament which raised over \$110,000 to support our local DAV Foundation.

- Bill Roberts also continued its partnership with the Last Chance Nordic Ski Club to provide high quality cross-country skiing for the public.

2023 Goals

- The Parks, Recreation and Open Lands team will continue focusing on needed improvements to the City's public spaces and providing high quality recreation programs.
- Planned Park improvements include new playground equipment for Leo Pocha Park.

Police

2022 Accomplishments

- The Police Department overcame substantial staffing issues in 2022, while continuing to serve the City at its highest level. After starting the year with 8 vacant Officer positions, the department is near full staffing and expects to have all officer positions filled by mid-2023.
- In 2022 the Police Department was also committed to expanding its community engagement. The department held its second Citizen Academy and now is talking about having an advance academy for Helena citizens that attended the first and second citizen academies.
- The Police Department also hosted its first Coffee with a Cop since before the COVID-19 pandemic began.
- The department also hosted the first ever Curt Stinson Memorial Blood drive in honor of the late Assistant Chief Stinson.
- The Police Department was able to finalize an agreement with the Helena School District for its School Resource Officer program. This agreement supports a partnership between the City of Helena and the Helena School District by improving school and law enforcement collaboration and ultimately providing a safe learning environment for our children.
- The Police Department was able to donate a patrol vehicle to Stevensville Police Department. This patrol vehicle was set to go to auction; however the City was able to coordinate with Stevensville PD and get a resolution approved by the City Commission in order to make this donation happen.
- The 911-Dispatch Center faced and overcame one of the biggest staffing challenges ever seen by the team. With the dedication of current staff, and shifts being filled by the Operations and Program Managers, we were

able to survive without degraded service. As of December of 2022, the 911 Center is now at full capacity for staffing.

- Thanks to their hard work, the 911 Operations and 911 Program Manager received recognition being awarded Team of the Year from the Montana Chapter of the Association of Public Safety Communication Officials.

2023 Goals

- Leadership is working closely with the Helena Police Association to implement and maintain a mental health program within the Department for our Officers and support staff. This program has started but we are hoping to make the program more robust in 2023 to make sure our Officers and staff are healthy.
- Community engagement will remain one of the Police department's primary focuses, along with Public Safety. The PD will strive to make sure the department is keeping and developing positive community partnerships.
- The Dispatch team is continuously building and maintaining relationships with all departments served by the communications center. This includes working with Lewis and Clark County DES on improving use of the City's mass alert notification system.
- The 911 Center is also planning on bringing back its successful Public Safety Open House that showcases the work of Dispatchers for the public.

Public Works

2022 Accomplishments

Water Treatment

- Chessman Reservoir, one of the City's primary water supplies, was full for the first time since 2017, thanks to a strong snowpack and diligent management of the City's water supply.

Wastewater Treatment

- The City's Wastewater Treatment Plant celebrated the 12th consecutive successful quarterly Whole Effluent Toxicity test, which marks the longest stretch in facility history.

Solid Waste

- The City's Solid Waste division continued serving the greater Helena community, with the Transfer Station providing service to 163,000 vehicles in 2022.
- In addition to City residents, the Transfer Station issued over 15,000 Scratch Gravel and Marysville permits.

Sustainability

- Sustainability continues to be a priority for the City, with strategic planning and education a focus in 2022. The City completed the Strategic Plan for Waste Reduction thanks to significant public involvement.
- The City also created informational videos on proper recycling practices, water conservation, and the City's water system.
- Finally, the City participated in the National Mayor's Challenge for Water Conservation and ranked highest out of the seven major Montana Cities.

Engineering Department

- The Engineering team accomplish a tremendous amount of work despite being understaffed throughout the year. The City completed \$3 million in water and wastewater system capital improvements.
- The Engineering team also began Water Treatment and Wastewater Collection and Treatment Master Plans.

2023 Goals

- The Public Works team will be busy with projects in 2023 thanks to an influx in funding through ARPA. The projects, which will improve Helena's drinking water system, include:
 - Replacing the Tenmile Creek diversion structures
 - Replacing the water treatment filters at the Tenmile Plant
 - Repairing the Red Mountain Flume
 - Replace the Valves on the Crosstown Connector Main
- The City will add new electric vehicle charging stations in 2023, with projects at the Jackson St. Garage and the Golf Course.
- Staff are also working to finish the installation of the solar panels at the City's Transportation Systems Department Building.
- Planning will continue to be a focus for Public Works in 2023. Planning efforts include:

- Develop an Integrated Solid Waste Mater Plan, in collaboration with Lewis and Clark County, to be completed in Fiscal Year 2024.
- Complete a Wastewater Treatment facilities masterplan to give the clear direction for the future.

Transportation Systems

2022 Accomplishments

- The Transportation team led the reconstruction of 6 blocks of Rodney Street, in phased 2 of the project.
- The City also helped improve accessibility around Helena, installing 56 ADA ramps.

Streets/Traffic Division

- The Streets Division was busy in 2022, completing over 47,000 square miles of Mill and Overlay work, while also repairing an estimated 1,650 potholes.
- Streets also graded approximately 160 alley blocks in 2022.

Capital Transit

- Capital Transit introduced a new Demand Response model in 2022 and experienced an immediate increase in ridership. The Transit system tripled our pandemic-era annual ridership in just 9 months.
- The new service model was supported by a ride scheduling app, which greatly improved the Transit system's efficiency.
- Implemented new Spare Labs routing software and facilitated a smooth transition to our Demand Response service model

Helena Parking

- The City's Parking services saw an increase in revenue and use in 2022. Parking reported over 190,000 transactions throughout the year, which is up by 13,000 from 2021.
- The Parking Division also helped process 83 Special Event Applications to hold events in City rights-of-way and properties.

2023 Goals

- The Transportation Systems team will be busy in 2023 with projects and studies, including:
 - Move forward with recent designs for a roundabout and enhanced pedestrian crossings at mini-malfunction junction
 - Moving forward the Custer Avenue reconstruction project

- Complete up to 36,800 square miles of Mill and Overlay work
- Put into service the City's new electric street sweeper
- The Fleet Division plans to implement a new City-wide vehicle replacement schedule
- Capital Transit will continue evaluating expansion of services to Helena's North and West Valley, and possibly extending service days or hours of operation.
- Parking will be rolling out online payment options for permits and parking tickets.

CONCLUSION


Helena continues to work with many partners, including Lewis & Clark County, the State of Montana, the city of East Helena, YMCA, Helena Food Share, National Forest Service, Helena Housing Authority, Rocky Mountain Development Council, United Way, Helena Regional Airport, and many others. While we continue to work with our partners to improve our growing city, we must recognize the great deal of work that is ahead of us. We must boldly tackle tough issues, such as affordable housing for our vulnerable populations, and public safety, while still reflecting the principles and charitable character of our citizens. Together, with our partners, we will accomplish these goals and more, while still tending to our fiscal responsibilities and in service to those who entrusted these decisions to us.

As the City Charter states, Helena is the proud seat for our state government, and as such, it should strive to be the model for the future of our great state. Ladies and Gentlemen, the state of affairs of the City of Helena remains strong.

I thank you all and I am looking forward to serving you in the years to come. God Bless this City, State and the United States.




Clerk of the Commission


Wilmot J. Collins, Mayor