

Helena Citizen's Council
Regular Meeting
December 14, 2005

Current Members Present: Jim Christnacht, George Hoff, Teresa Klotz, Jerry McGee, Bill Roberts, Allen Tompkins, Justin Trafton and Thom Warsinski,.

Current Members Absent: Robert Clarkson, Laura Erickson, Bob Habeck, Jerry Hutch, Keith Jones, Wayne Lewis, Jan Lombardi, Joe Ruby and Delma Sommers.

Newly Elected Members Present: Ellen Bell, Becky Bird, Lynne Boone, Matthew Cohn, Marshall Gingery, Patty Rambo, Jim Tucker Jr.

Newly Elected Members Absent: Amy Glasscock, Rebecca Ridenour and Berdene Steen.

Visitors Present: Cheryl Liedle, Jack Spillman, Troy McGee, Corey Livesay, Steve Larson, Leo Dutton, Tim Burton, Jim Whaley, George McCauley, and Alan Peura.

Approval of November 16 Minutes: The minutes were approved as written.

Treasurer's Report: Our total annual budget is \$1565, and at the end of November, we had \$1045 in our account. However, Bill Roberts indicated that most (all?) of that balance was used to advertise the Meth Awareness town hall meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

HCC "Thank You" letter to HCC members that didn't run for reelection:

Laura was going to draft a letter for our review at this meeting, but she wasn't able to be here tonight. George checked with Debbie Havens, and she hasn't seen anything from Laura on this.

HCC Officer Nominating Committee:

Officer elections will take place at the regular HCC meeting on January 25th.

The committee has decided to combine the Chair/Vice Chair nominees into one pool. The person receiving the most votes will be Chair, the second-most will be Vice Chair.

So far, the committee has the following candidates for the four officer positions.

Chair and Vice Chair: George Hoff and Justin Trafton

Treasurer: Jim Christnacht

Secretary: Teresa Klotz

Newly elected HCC members are encouraged to run for officer positions. It's a great way to learn about the HCC, so don't let being new stop you if you're interested.

If you would like to serve in this capacity, please let Bill Roberts know. There will also be space on the ballots for write-ins.

Swearing in Ceremony:

Will take place at 6pm on Monday January 9th, at the City Commission meeting.

All elected members should plan to be in attendance.

NEW BUSINESS:

Public Safety Radio Antennae Installation (presentation by Lewis & Clark County Sheriff's Dept, Helena Police Dept and the Helena Fire Dept.)

This project started back in 1998 when an assessment of their existing analog radio system determined the entire system needed to be replaced.

To get started, they received \$125,000 as seed money from a Public Safety mill levy.

They were also awarded a \$5.7 million grant through FEMA right after 9/11. They were 1 of 14 agencies, nation-wide, to receive funding, primarily due to the strong partnerships between our different public safety entities.

Helena became the concept demo for Montana and very quickly became the pilot demo for the entire U.S. We were the only success story among the FEMA grant recipients.

Lewis and Clark County/Helena are part of a consortium that includes Broadwater, Jefferson and Powell Counties, as well as the State Dept. of Corrections. We will be moving to a state-wide system within 5 years, with Helena as the control point.

The new Motorola system uses digital-trunked technology; which seamlessly roams and trunks me to a

channel. It has 10 receivers (vs. 3 in the old system). They had to build 2 new towers, but are partnering with others for use of existing towers.

When they overlay the coverage by all of the existing antennae sites, there is a hole on the Eastside of town, most notably at/around St. Peter's Hospital. They have evaluated several different sites to try to fill in this gap. Due to Helena's topography, the top of Nob Hill is the only site that will provide adequate coverage for the Eastside area.

For public safety reasons, Helena's Police and Fire Dept's cannot move over to the new system until the Eastside issues are resolved.

The developer of the Nob Hill subdivision gave 28 acres to the City for its use, which includes the top of Nob Hill. The City anticipated using it as parkland, but now we have a public safety issue to address.

Site Proposal:

A laminate wood tower, apx. 60+ feet tall, to clear the top of the trees plus some growth.

An equipment building (pebble aggregate type structure) with AC power to be run underground, for computers and other equipment required to run the antennae.

Some type of (attractive) fencing around both the tower and building.

Access will be restricted to ATV or snowmobile, with the lone exception being propane tank refills. Propane is for the backup power/generator.

Their hope is to be able to put it in the trees, without removing any of the trees.

Has anyone been opposed to this proposal?

Tim is not aware of any opposition, but they're presenting to a variety of groups, trying to get as much support as possible. Both HOLMAC and the City/County Parks Board are supportive of the Nob Hill site proposal. The Parks Board will require approval of the site plan. They'll present to the City Commission at the 1/4/06 Admin Meeting, and expect it to appear on the City Commission agenda in January.

If it's the goal of this antennae site to coexist with a recreational area, what kind of security do we need to protect the antennae site?

It will be fenced in, and intrusion alarms are included in the project.

Is it possible to put the building underground?

From a cost perspective, it isn't feasible to go underground. When we built the water reservoir, we ran into granite bedrock during construction, which required blasting and drove the price higher than anticipated. There are also issues with moisture that make going underground more problematic.

Can you put the tower on the top of the hill, but the building off-site, by the water reservoir for example?

The antennae must be next to the equipment that's running it. The farther away it is, we experience more signal degradation.

Q) Is there redundancy built into the system?

Yes, to the lowest level of analog signal. The antennae are setup in a ring configuration. If one antennae fails, the microwave reroutes the traffic in the opposite direction. We have a Radio Administrator who carries a pager 24x7 and is immediately alerted to any problems as they occur. We also plan to do routine maintenance on this system, which is something we failed to do with the old radio system.

Can the signal be interrupted?

The system works on a narrow band frequency, so it will be harder to interfere with. It will also be encrypted and firewall protected.

Once this is approved, how long before the site is functioning?

They hope to get the City Commission's approval in January. It may take a few weeks after that to get the Parks Dept's approval. Then depending on the weather, if they can drill, they'll get busy building. The sooner, the better.

Do you have enough staff to patrol the greater Helena area?

The public safety mill levy increased taxes, but it gave public safety responders the ability to take adequate care of us. Population growth was built into it and money was set aside for future projects. Both the Police and Fire Dept's need more personnel, which is not covered by the public safety mill levy. And our general fund won't grow the same as our population. We have good, well maintained equipment and facilities, so we don't anticipate large expenditures in those areas – which will allow us to focus on personnel.

Comments:

They tried to get a tower on the ASARCO stack but got no cooperation from ASARCO.

All vehicle access to the site must be approved by Lilje and the Parks Dept.

We all agree about the public safety issues we're facing, and that we want to get this resolved as quickly as possible. Please remember that land is first and foremost parkland – it's going to be a park for a very long time. Slow down and do the work that's required to accommodate both needs for this site.

For updates on this issue and to access their newsletter, please go to the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's website (www.co.lewis-clark.mt.us/safety/sheriff/index.php) or the State of Montana, Public Safety Services Bureau (mt.gov/itsd/techmt/pssb.asp).

Motion: The HCC endorse the plan for the Nob Hill Communication Site as proposed.

Motion Carries

New Fire Hall, construction and possible location (presentation by Steve Larson)

The Helena Fire Dept. is in the process of conducting a Fire Service Review, using an outside consultant to determine what they're doing well, where they need to improve, what groups they can partner with and what funding sources may be available to them.

HFD is a physical delivery service. Questions they're facing are how much service to deliver and how soon? How funding, road structure and terrain affect their response time? Where to locate fire stations, how soon do we need them, how to pay for them?

HFD has worked hard during the past 5 years to make improvements to their equipment and facilities. Now they're facing the question of accommodating Helena's growth, and the current general fund isn't budgeted for it.

They currently have 2 stations; one at the Civic Center and one on Hannaford. The increase in traffic has really started to impact their response times. The growth on the North side is a big "problem". They're working to pull response time data from their computer system.

HFD answers apx. 2700 calls per year, 80% of which are medical. They're also responding to hazmat calls. Both of which are very new within the past several years. We also have wildland/urban interface issues to deal with – managing the view around Helena is very important to all of us.

There are no current plans to build a new fire station, but it's coming. After they get the results of the review, we'll need to decide what we want to do as a community.

HFD has a standing agreement with all of the rural fire departments to provide and/or receive assistance whenever it is requested.

What initiated this review?

It is internally driven, based on the growth issues we're facing and questions from the City Commission about what we're doing and why we're doing it.

In all of the development, are any “set asides” included in the subdivision layouts?

Under existing law/code, set asides are not required for HFD. HFD must purchase land or property from the general fund budget. They can also use/improve existing sites, but that must also be paid for from the general fund.

Is all of the new retail space creating special problems?

Not really. They’re newer buildings built to current code. Some of our older retail structures can actually be more of a hazard.

Is there any plan to use CERT trained citizens in emergencies?

No, we don’t have a plan in place. It’s a great idea to use the Citizen’s Corps, but HFD doesn’t have the resources to make it grow right now.

What about the Ten Mile Creek watershed?

The City pays the Baxendale Fire District for coverage.

How does the “checkerboard” of City/County property affect response times?

New CAD systems we’re using are address driven, so we know whether a property is City or County and whose responsibility it is to respond. HFD covers all of the Westside, out to apx. the Broadwater/Baxendale Fire District border.

Is there a plan to phase in the checkerboard areas that aren’t in the City limits?

That’s up to the rural fire districts, who have legal autonomy and each has their own Fire Board. They are facing challenges with maintaining and growing their memberships.

What about Valley annexation and the impact of the Volunteer Fire Dept’s?

How to handle situations where the City encroaches on the County is an issue. The developer of Aspen Trails wants to connect to City services due to failing septic systems in that community. While the City avoids forced annexation, their policy is that partial City services aren’t an option – it’s all or nothing. The rural VFD’s face a loss of potential revenue when County folks move on to City services. After the last City Commission meeting, Steve talked to the gentleman from the West Valley FD, but it sounds like their Board isn’t interested in working with the HFD.

Will you come see us again, after you get the results of the Fire Service Review?

Yes. And if you have questions, please email the Chief at slarson@ci.helena.mt.us.

District Reports:

Due to an extremely full agenda, we didn't have time for regular District reports. George gave us the following highlights:

Districts 2 and 6 are affected by the proposed changes to allow a Walgreen's store at the corner of Montana and 11th.

District 4 has the subdivision in process on the Schatz Ranch property, west of Helena.

District 5 has the Aspen Trails subdivision in process.

District 6 also has some activity at the Helena College of Technology (HCT).

The last Legislative session made \$7.5 million available for HCT improvements.

The proposed changes to the site at Roberts and Townsend/Harris will require a zoning change, from R2 (multi-family, residential) to PLI (public lands & institutions) to allow for a multi-purpose admin building and a parking lot.

Jim Whaley (Dept of Admin, Architects & Engineers) is planning a public meeting during the first week of January to talk about proposed changes.

Please let Jim know if you have specific questions you'd like to see addressed at the public meeting.

Are you aware there's a cemetery near there? The Helena Diocese deeded this land to the City, and aren't aware of any gravesites on the property.

Was a parking ramp considered vs. a flat lot? No – for cost reasons. Raised structures cost apx. \$100 per square foot. Flat lots cost apx. \$10 per square foot.

Other Comments:

Tim Burton has indicated that the City is working on a city-wide meeting about Helena's deer population.

The City can provide email addresses for HCC members, for an annual charge of \$100 per person. However, HCC doesn't have enough money in its budget to cover this expense. Bill is checking with Tim and Debbie for the possibility of available funds vs. having to wait for the next budget cycle to request the funding.

Fire Chief Larson has asked that if we do another Disaster Preparedness public meeting, that we videotape it for broadcast on HCTV and consider making copies available to new Helena residents.

Ken Saunders will invite Eric Grove (Great Divide Cyclery) to our March meeting to make a brief presentation about the “Rails to Trails” effort.

A couple of months ago, George McCauley gave the HCC a list of quality of life issues that he and other citizens are concerned about. We will invite him to make a presentation at the March HCC meeting.

If you have ideas for presentations, or concerns that affect Helena, please let the officers know so they can include them on the HCC calendar/agenda. Officers have been meeting apx. 2 weeks prior to the HCC meeting to put together the next meeting’s agenda.

Meeting Assignments:

Starting in January, newly elected members can volunteer to represent the HCC at City Admin and City Commission meetings. It was recommended that we tag team an “old” member with a new member to help orient ourselves to these meetings.

City Admin Meetings:

January 4th: Marshall Gingery and George Hoff

January 25th: Lynne Boone and Bill Roberts

City Commission Meetings:

December 19th: Jim Tucker Jr. and Bill Roberts

January 9th: All HCC members should plan to attend at least the swearing in ceremony. George Hoff will give the report from the HCC.

January 30th: Matthew Cohn and Teresa Klotz

City Manager's Meeting:

The date for the next meeting is still to be announced.

Tim Burton will give us a calendar for all of 2006, so we can schedule people to attend.

Next HCC Meetings:

January 25th - Election of new officers and orientation of HCC members will be the focus of this meeting. Last month George gave us the list of various City committees. At the January meeting, please be prepared to let our newly elected Chair which committee(s) you're interested in serving on. The Chair will make the committee appointments.

February 22nd – the Mayor, City Commissioners and some City staff will join us at this meeting. They have asked that this entire meeting be devoted to them – that there be no other agenda. We think this would be a good opportunity to ask them about the City's complaint procedures.