

Helena Citizen's Council

Regular Meeting

February 22, 2006

Members Present: Ellen Bell, Becky Bird, Lynne Boone, Jim Christnacht, Matthew Cohn, Mary Ann Dunwell, Laura Erickson, Marshall Gingery, Amy Glasscock, Bob Habeck, George Hoff, Teresa Klotz, Jan Lombardi, Jerry McGee, Larry Mitchell, Patty Rambo, Rebecca Ridenour, Bill Roberts, Ken Saunders, Allen Tompkins, Loyd Tracy, Justin Trafton, Jim Tucker Jr. and Thom Warsinski.

Members Absent: Tripp Hammer (?) and Jay Synness.

Visitors Present: Mayor Smith, Commissioners Cartright, Oitzinger and Peura, Tim Burton, Debbie Havens, Robyn Brown, Clinda Feucht and Mark McDonnell.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The January 25, 2006 minutes were approved as submitted.

OLD BUSINESS:

Thank You Letter: On December 19th, Mayor Smith sent a "thank you" letter to past HCC members.

City Boards and Committees:

Bob Habeck sent out the most recent list of assignments on Feb. 17th.

If you have no objection to your assignment(s), please start attending meetings.

Whether you're a voting member or an observer varies by board/committee.

Email Bob Habeck with any actionable items that come out of your committee.

Let Justin Trafton know if you're interested in any of the remaining vacancies.

Bob Habeck and Matthew Cohn have volunteered to serve on the City's Urban Wildlife Taskforce.

Paul Putz with the Historic Preservation Society has requested HCC participation on the Westside Historic District Inventory Project.

City Admin and Commission Meeting Proposal: Lynne Boone will present a written proposal at next month's meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion with Mayor Smith, the City Commissioners and Tim Burton:

THE ROLE OF THE HCC IN THE CITY PROCESS:

How does the City Commission anticipate utilizing the HCC in city issues?

How can the HCC best relate our concerns and those of our constituents to the City Commission toward impacting City policy?

What is the City Commission's commitment to including funds for HCC activities and staff in the City's budget, and what needs to be done to make this happen?

Mayor Smith: Is cognizant of HCC's autonomy, and he hasn't tried to dictate or manage the affairs of the HCC. The City Charter calls for the HCC and we're elected by Helena's citizens. In the past few years, we've improved our relationship by including HCC representatives on City boards, committees and ad-hoc committees. We have formalized communication between the Commission and the HCC. When the HCC takes a position, they forward it in writing and the Commission has committed to responding in writing. The Commission doesn't always adopt HCC recommendations, but they always carefully consider them. We've also included an HCC report as a regular agenda item at the City Admin and Commission meetings.

HCC activities and staff will cost money. HCC's budget is part of the City Commission budget, and some support needs can easily be added to that amount. The City has revised Robyn Brown's position description to include some time and responsibilities to help the HCC. Helena is at the maximum allowable mill levy and can't raise taxes any further. However, we are seeing increased revenue through growth. The Commission must decide the best way to use the money. In making a request for dedicated staff, the HCC needs to carefully consider whether spending City money in this way is worthwhile.

Mr. Burton: City staff see themselves as support for the HCC in that staff are there to provide information requested by the HCC, that may help the HCC advise the City Commission. Staff will always wait to be invited to HCC meetings. For example, at the request of the HCC, the Helena Police

Dept provides a standing report at the monthly HCC meetings.

City staff do not pursue projects, and they have a structured process they must follow when they are approached with projects. They must assess projects based on the laws, rules and ordinances that apply. They are a resource and a conduit of information. They don't weigh in on policy discussions and they don't judge public sentiment – however they always talk to applicants about outreach to the neighborhoods that will be affected by their project.

Commissioner Peura: In addition to serving on City boards/committees, he would like to ask us to host neighborhood or city-wide meetings to help gather the diverse opinions of Helena citizens when contentious issues arise. We may be wise to negotiate HCC's role on a case by case basis. One of HCC's primary Charter functions is to participate in the City's budget process, where it would be very helpful to have a strong and active HCC presence, specifically regarding changes.

With respect to staff assistance, he asks that we put together a list of things the HCC needs to have done for us, what tasks can help us further what we're doing, the qualifications a staffer would need to have to be most helpful to us - so the Commission can determine whether our request merits the commitment of additional staff.

Commissioner Oitzinger: One of her concerns when she was on the HCC was how to find out what people think, what they want. She'd like to see us choose a topic and go out into our neighborhoods. We need to find a way to develop common appreciation, common solutions, help understand the ethic of each neighborhood to minimize polarization and being reactive.

In response to a question about sharing a position between the HCC and the proposed TCC advisor position as a way of optimizing staff positions, she feels that the skill sets needed for these two positions vary too dramatically to try to find one person to fill both of those roles.

Commissioner Cartright: It's really up to the HCC to decide how it wants to focus itself. On the legal side, How does the HCC want to approach its primary Charter function of reviewing the City's budget? Different bodies give the Commission advice, but they don't always take it. The request for a staffer is included in the budget request and it seems plausible.

COMMUNITY GROWTH:

What individual and/or cooperative, ongoing discussions are taking place regarding the development in the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County?

What plans are in place to increase police and fire department staffing and facilities to maintain public safety in the face of Helena's growth?

What is the City Commission's commitment to non-motorized transportation?

Mayor Smith: The City and County Commissions currently have a joint meeting monthly. A good relationship between the two Commissions is key, but the relationship between City and County staff is equally important. The County has discussed (and sees the benefit of) applying City standards to County growth in a portion of the Valley, since the City is growing in that direction. This didn't happen on the West Side which has resulted in a broad mix of property owners receiving partial City services but not being part of the City tax base – we're trying to avoid this in the Valley.

Typically, developers pay for infrastructure and at cutover, the City becomes responsible in perpetuity. Police, fire and other areas are affected by development, but the developer doesn't currently pay for the impact they have. The last Legislative session granted approval for impact fees, and the Commission has started talking whether/how to use them so the cost increases of these other areas will fall on new development vs. existing taxpayers. The Commission will be talking to builders, realtors and others who could be affected by the adoption of impact fees.

Non-motorized transportation was an element in the City's transportation plan. The City has set aside \$1 million to put sidewalks around City property (Lockey Park, for example). Individual property owners are responsible for sidewalks adjacent to their property, but the City has a low interest (1%) program to help property owners install and/or replace sidewalks. HOLMAC and the Prickly Pear Land Trust are working on sustainable trails. A bike/pedestrian coordinator is also being considered by the Commission.

Commissioner Cartright: The City/County are an integrated economy. The City is affected by what happens to Valley citizens, and we don't want to take on any more liabilities – like retrofitting neighborhoods for water and sewer when septic systems start to fail. The Growth Plan doesn't represent the only growth that will occur, but it allows us to be more responsive as the unexpected occurs. Not so much what we will look like as what we don't want to look like.

Mr. Burton: Some City/County services are shared, which is smart and saves the taxpayers money – dispatch, records, SWAT, IT, ambulance and more. Land use issues, lot sizes, water quality, failed septic affect all of us. If there's a public health issue, the City tries to act quickly which is unique to any County geography in Montana and reflects well on our staffs.

All City Departments have more work than they can do, so what do they want to do with the dollars they have to work with? We're not in a crisis with public safety; Helena's increased revenue has allowed us to maintain equipment, facilities and train staff. In determining the number of police we need there's more involved than a simple ratio of officers to citizens. Fire service hasn't been reviewed for over 2 decades and they're doing that now. Our fire department handles fire protection, fire prevention, hazmat and emergency medical (the majority of calls). Montana has a unique tax structure, so we must compare ourselves to like-structured areas.

Water quality is an absolutely critical issue. Much of what drives what we'll look like is what happens with our water (Ten Mile Creek, etc.). We're in an excellent position with our water treatment system. It is built to sustain a significant amount of growth, and we're currently at 50% capacity. We don't always accurately anticipate growth - Custer Avenue and N. Montana are examples of that. No one foresaw the retail growth of those areas. Most development is driven by private property owners,

and it's the City's job is to make sure they follow the rules.

In response to a question about long range (5-20 years) planning in the City and County and how the County feels about us "land grabbers", the County loves it. They will lose some levy funding but otherwise no loss in revenue, and a big liability transfers to the City.

Commissioner Peura: Land use, annexation, subdivisions are complex issues that are here to stay and will multiply. The primary function of the urban growth mapping process is to determine where growth makes sense. A dedicated group on this topic would be helpful; perhaps the HCC would consider a sub-committee on land use to help us understand regulations, etc.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES:

What are the Commission's plans for youth development in Helena?

What efforts are being made to let the community know about the kid's activities Helena already offers?

What steps are being taken to reduce the sale of alcohol to underage kids, the number of DUI's and the amount of alcohol-related abuse in Helena?

Commissioner Oitzinger: The Helena Youth Advisory Council (HYAC) planned to serve kids from 5th grade through high school seniors. They've learned kids are aging out of the focus group they used, but they have the data from the first time around and doesn't think it's changed much. The Skate Park was the first deliverable and expansion of that has been discussed. The need for a youth center was also identified, but is a more complex undertaking and they're not sure the City is the right sponsor for it. We had a grant from the Turner Foundation who has expressed concerns that the HYAC wasn't optimizing those funds so they're looking for another grant recipient. Kids in Helena want a youth center, but finding the right provider and array of services is the work. It's wide open at this point. For it to work, it must be a magnet and there must be zero tolerance for substance abuse. Other communities have failed at this – the kids just don't show up. Bozeman recently closed their attempt. Another concern was the pockets of isolated kids in the valley who wouldn't be served by a center in town. (A comment was made that there are also pockets of isolated kids in town as well.)

She thinks it's interesting that our question asked about youth development vs. youth activity. That's the thing – how to help our kids develop.

(Jim Tucker Jr. talked about an attempt at a youth center out at the old Cooney Convalescent Home about 15 years ago. It failed due to substance abuse – it became a distribution point. Which led to more

adult supervision of the center, and kids didn't want to hang out at a place where the adults outnumbered the kids.)

(Jan Lombardi stated the HYAC included 2 kids. They planned a Community Arts and Music festival for families. It was organized by the kids – permits, food, music, etc. They took it on and made it happen. Apx. 80 people attended. It is important to ask them to help organize events – involve them in the decision making.)

Commissioner Cartright: The City is basically an infrastructure organization. The city may be able to help with part of what kids are interested in - help fund activities, intramural sports, etc. The goal is for Helena to be a safe town where our kids can be independent, and not just provide them with a safe place to hang out.

Commissioner Peura: Would like to see us work to get kids involved at the front end of the process. For example, include them at the table in the Downtown Visioning group. A recent poll showed that 50% of our kids think adults are soft on alcohol – that we condone its use. True or no, that's their perception. When we're talking about Helena, we need to include them.

Mr. Burton: Schools are the primary service provider to our youth. The City funds the school resource officer program because the School District can't afford to. HPD authorizes undercover alcohol sales to minors. The last time they did this, they had 100% compliance which is a big improvement. Alcohol is the biggest problem we have, and we have zero tolerance for MIP's, DUI's and Partner/Family Member Assault charges – the City prosecutes even if the family doesn't want to pursue the matter.

BUSINESS/TOURISM:

How does the City Commission see its role in tourism, and the development of tourism?

What is the City Commission's role in historic preservation and the development of different areas of Helena? Downtown and Mid-Town, as examples.

What hurdles are there to prevent the city from offering city-wide wireless internet service for a fee or otherwise?

(Time was a little thin by this part of the discussion.)

Commissioner Peura: The City has been working with the 6th Ward neighborhood group for the past year to provide City resources to help apply for funding support – Tax Increment Finance (TIF) group for this neighborhood. The City has also appointed 1 Commissioner and 1 City Staff to participate on the Downtown Helena Visioning group.

Mr. Burton: Urban renewal mistakes have been made in historic areas, but generally they have done a good job maintaining many areas. The City dedicated \$6 million to the Great Northern development which has been very successful. The downtown Valley Bank remodel and the new Galusha building on Last Chance Gulch are two more examples.

Mary Ann Dunwell asked what the City is doing to revitalize people who are less fortunate than others, homeless Veterans for example.

Mayor Smith: The City's role in social services is limited, because the City can't take on funding. The County and State are responsible for funding these services. We can ask the Commission and City staff to be involved in groups and the City can help with grant programs that aren't available to citizens.

Commissioner Cartright: The City isn't eligible to receive federal funding. It's a tough thing - we work to revitalize neighborhoods and property values increase but we need to work to keep housing prices reasonable so we don't price people out of their homes. It's a dilemma.

Commissioner Oitzinger: Betty Beverly, a senior advocate, says the most effective way to help senior citizens is to keep them in their own homes. City actions can directly impact citizens through our fee structure so we need to consider the impact our decisions, growth, etc. have on residents, housing costs, etc.

Other Comments:

Matthew Cohn expressed his thanks to the Mayor City Commission and City Staff for the excellent job they do on behalf of Helena. We're well served – thank you!

Meeting Assignments:

City Admin Meetings:

March 8; Marshall Gingery

March 22; Allen Tompkins

City Commission Meetings:

February 27; Thom Warsinski

March 13; Bill Roberts

March 27; George Hoff

City Manager's Meeting:

Date TBA; George Hoff

No further information about a calendar of the 2006 City Manager meeting dates.

Next HCC Meeting:

March 22nd – agenda to be determined.

Respectfully Submitted by Teresa Klotz, HCC Secretary, District 3