

Helena Citizen's Council
Regular Meeting – June 28, 2006

Members Present: Ellen Bell, Matthew Cohn, Mary Ann Dunwell, Marshall Gingery, Amy Glasscock, Bob Habeck, Teresa Klotz, Mark McDonnell, Larry Mitchell, Rebecca Ridenour, Bill Roberts, Ken Saunders, Loyd Tracy and Justin Trafton.

Members Absent: Lynne Boone, Jim Christnacht, Laura Erickson, George Hoff, Tripp Hammer, Jan Lombardi, Jerry McGee, Patty Rambo, Jay Synness, Allen Tompkins, Jim Tucker Jr. and Thom Warsinski.

Visitors Present: Gayle Joslin with Fish, Wildlife and Parks

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The May 24, 2006 minutes were approved with these corrections:

Loyd Tracy was present at the May 24th meeting.

George McCauley has given Kate Wilson, Director of the Cooperative Health Center, Justin's contact info to set a time for her and the County Health Officer to talk with the HCC at a future meeting.

HELENA POLICE DEPT REPORT: Assistant Chief Mark Lerum

Calls have increased since school is out for the summer.

An individual will be charged in the recent death of a 6-month old infant.

HPD has hired 4 new officers; 2 will start on July 17th, attending the field training officer program for 14 weeks, and 2 will start in September. When these officers are trained, HPD will be fully staffed. The 911 Center has hired a Dispatcher/Records Clerk as well as a Dispatcher.

Junior Police Academy, sponsored by the Montana Chiefs Association, starts July 17th. 30 to 35 kids, ages 16 to 17 years old will attend 1 week of training to encourage interest in law enforcement as a career. 1 student will be chosen to receive a \$1000 scholarship to the college of their choice plus 1 week at the FBI Academy at Quantico.

Jackson Street/Golden Triangle Update: This non-secure facility is located at 836 N. Jackson. HPD hasn't received any calls for assistance since they opened in June. It's staffed by 2 people, on a 24x7x365 basis and can handle up to 7 clients. It gives people having a mental health crisis a safe place to go, voluntarily. Golden Triangle is working more closely with the neighborhood and has been holding monthly meetings with staff and neighbors since May. Meetings are going well, and they believe their relationship is improving. There will not be a July meeting, but clients will be sharing

their experience at the August 7th meeting. HPD has also helped set up 3 Neighborhood Watch groups in the area, and is working on 1 more. A total of 7 police officers have completed training on dealing with people with mental illness, in crisis.

Lewis and Clark County is working on a grant for a secure facility for crisis management.

What is Neighborhood Watch? How do you set it up? What is HPD's involvement?

Guy Gibson, who has 20 years experience, coordinates this program.

Let Asst Chief Lerum know if you're interested in forming a Neighborhood Watch group, and he'll put you in contact with Guy Gibson.

HPD will send a flyer to your neighbors and organize the initial meeting.

They recommend limiting a watch group to 1 or 2 blocks, so you know each other.

HPD charges \$40 per sign, but there are no installation fees for the signs.

A Watch group can invite HPD to attend additional meetings and present information.

Officer Gibson will also do an assessment of your home, to show you ways you can make your house more secure.

The large number of abandon/junk vehicles on State and Rodney Street? How does that ordinance/program work?

HPD has 2 day and 2 afternoon officers assigned to this process, but their ability to respond depends on their call volume. Abandoned/junk vehicles aren't priority calls.

The process is begins when the HPD receives a complaint.

The officer marks the vehicle's tire, dates and files a report on the vehicle.

If the owner doesn't move the vehicle within 72 hours, HPD tags the car "abandoned" and notifies the owner it will be towed within 5 days.

Based on call loads, HPD can't always get back to it within that time frame.

If the car has moved (as little as 3"), HPD can't tag it as abandoned, and the process often begins again.

Right now Al Rose is the only company that will tow abandoned vehicles in Helena. They have a contract to tow within 24 hours of HPD notification – if he's not shut down by the State for being full.

HPD has contracts with other towers to tow regular vehicles, but they have to work with the State to get reimbursed for abandoned/junk vehicles. It's a big paperwork process, there are storage issues, all fluids must be drained before the cars can be crushed. The reality is that towers may lose money if they handle these vehicles.

If you want to get rid of a vehicle, contact the County Health Dept. The paperwork process is relatively easy (very different for the HPD to seize your vehicle). Officers give owners a copy of these forms when they're called about abandoned vehicles, but people aren't typically interested. People often store cars on the street due to lack of off-street storage and/or have emotional attachments to them - they don't think they're junk.

About a year ago, the County started a junk vehicle program. If the HPD assesses the value of the vehicle to be less than \$500, they send a report to the County who checks it out. HPD will check it again and then mark it as junk. The County tows on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, depending on their workload.

Can we revise the ordinance to make it more reasonable? Yes, but it won't change the number of staff the HPD has available to process these complaints.

Other cities handle this issue differently. This Friday Asst Chief Lerum is meeting with the officers who handle abandoned vehicles to consider refining the process.

HCC TREASURER'S REPORT: Fiscal year 2006 charges were due to Debbie Havens by 6/23/06. At that time, we had \$500 remaining of our \$1565 budget. That balance will return to the general fund. Although the City's budget isn't complete for fiscal year 2007, the HCC's preliminary budget is apx. \$3200.

DISTRICT DISCUSSIONS: HCC members are encouraged to request items for this part of the agenda in advance of our monthly meeting.

Open Lands Maintenance Fee: Bill Roberts

The Public Hearing for the Open Lands Management District is scheduled for the July 17th City Commission meeting.

City property owners received a notice they should return if they OPPOSE the proposal. If more than 50% oppose the fee, it won't go into effect.

Thanks to the Open Space Bond, the City increased its parkland from 700 acres to 1600 acres. Once acquisitions were made, HOLMAC developed the management plan with much public scrutiny; weeds, fire control/tree thinning, trail management, wild flowers and more – not just on Mount Helena. (The thinning project on the East Side resulted in neighborhood approval of a new golf course.)

OSBAC funding will run out within the next year, so we need to determine how to maintain the progress they've made. HOLMAC recommends an Open Lands Manager to direct the resources (financial and volunteer). Assessing an annual charge of \$13.50 per individual property will raise up to a max of \$156k to cover salary and services. If approved, the charge will appear on our property tax bills, like tree and lighting districts.

It's important to recognize the tremendous amount of volunteer support Helena's open lands management receives; Prickly Pear Land Trust (mapping, trail work), Youth Conservation Corps (trail work, installing trail signs), Native Plant Society, local bike clubs to name a few.

Comments:

Is there other open space in the City besides mountainous? "Open Space" is considered separate from other parkland, soccer fields, etc. (although OSBAC funds were used to purchase soccer fields). Centennial Park, behind the YMCA, is not part of this.

Why create a Special Improvement District (SID)? It was Randy Lilje's decision not to include it in the budget. The open space bond was a major commitment by the City of Helena. He believes it will be better to create an annuity to allow us to maintain the land, rather than having to defend it in the annual budget process. The City may also be at or close to its mill levy limit.

How do we explain this to fixed income property owners?

Our open space is a community asset that we all benefit from.

It's not something I use or feel I should have to pay for, but it's a Quality of Life issue that we have been talking about.

Ellen Bell just moved to Janet where there is open land (that is mostly weeds) near her property. The City suggested that she get together with her neighbors to develop a SID to develop a park on that property.

District 1: Ken Saunders

Has had a clipboard at his store downtown, polling public opinion about the level of interest in having public restrooms downtown. 476 people support the idea, 6 oppose it. This is in addition to his earlier inquiry of downtown business owners, where 30 businesses were for it, and 2 against.

Ken also brought copies of a FWP flyer about living with wildlife. He had 100 copies made at Action Print for apx. \$20. Please take some back to your Districts.

District 4: Ellen Bell has moved and is no longer eligible to be on the HCC for District 4. They already have one vacancy and Tripp Hammer has medical issues. If you know anyone on the lower west side who's interested... Justin offered that the City has an avenue for PSA's that we can use to advertise vacancies.

Lewis and Clark Citizens Corps Council: Mary Ann Dunwell
September is designated as "National Preparedness Month". Paul Spengler will ask the City Commission for a resolution to declare September as "Preparedness Month" in Helena.

Comments:

For the past 2 years, Paul Spengler and others coordinated a Preparedness Fair to address personal preparedness, the focus is teaching people to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours after a disaster or emergency.

HCC sponsored an emergency preparedness town hall meeting last fall. Does Paul want to do that again?

Isn't October already "Disaster Preparedness Month"? Will it change from October to September, or is this an additional event? Mary Ann will get more information.

They're also interested in getting more people through their CERT training program.

And they're discussing training Neighborhood Watch groups.

MADD?: (Sorry I didn't catch what this is – I'm slipping...)

Casey Molloy is working with the HCC on a Community Forum for the fall, the focus of which will be alcohol abuse. Bill remembers her mentioning it after the Meth Town Hall meeting, but doesn't recall any definite plan. He'll give her a call.

Phishing Emails:

Bill Roberts has seen an increase in phishing emails to his address that is only posted on the HCC website. This means we're all at risk for receiving these. Email addresses on the City domain are part of our fiscal year 2007 budget request. Until we know the status of our budget, be careful. You may also want to consider using a separate email address for HCC business.

OLD BUSINESS:

HCC Community Service Project:

The ad-hoc committee recommends Sunday October 1st as the date for the HCC sponsored community service day/project. Tim Burton is working with his staff to develop lists of potential projects for each of the 7 HCC Districts. He will get the lists to the ad-hoc committee by mid-July, and we'll be able to pass them on to the HCC by our July 26th meeting, if not sooner. The ad-hoc committee is also working on a "How To" template to help HCC members through the process of organizing a community service event.

Comments:

What about doing one large project vs. individual district projects?

Since we decided to put this project off until the fall, the ad-hoc committee believes it gives us adequate time to organize a project for each District. And by doing District-level projects, it will help neighborhoods start to work together. And the HCC can always elect to take on one HCC-wide project.

List of organizations the HPD should notify regarding scams:

At our May meeting, we suggested the HPD alert various organizations when their CID becomes aware of scams that. Office Dellwo encouraged us to provide them with the list. After some discussion, we agreed to submit this list to the HPD. Because these organizations have a long standing presence in our community, we don't think it's necessary to maintain the list on a regular basis.

Independent Record

Queen City News

Local TV stations

Rocky Mountain Development Council

Retirement communities; the Waterford, Hunter's Point, Eagles Manor

Downtown Helena, Inc.

AARP's Helena office

Lewis and Clark Library (they do computer training classes, have a public bulletin board)

NEW BUSINESS:

Urban Wildlife Task Force Presentation: Matthew Cohn (Co-Chair) and Gayle Joslin (FWP)
The task force is 2 HCC members, our Animal Control officer, 1 FWP, 1 City Commissioner and 4 citizens. A report of their recommendations is due to the City Commission by March 1, 2007.

As cities grow, we move closer to wildlife. Drought and gardens also attract wildlife to town. Wildlife have become habituated with people. How do we deal with it? How does zoning and city planning contribute to the problem. If we keep growing, we'll keep encroaching on their habitat. It isn't just an issue in Helena; other areas have been dealing with this far longer.

By definition, the task force includes all urban wildlife, but deer are at the top of the list. They forced the issue so they are the focus, with related safety concerns being the most important.

Matthew reviewed the power point presentation FWP has prepared for a state-wide discussion of this issue. The Legislature is asking cities to come up with a plan and FWP to work with each community to solve the problem. The biological carrying capacity may be over 100 deer per square mile, but the social carrying capacity is what we're willing to put up with. Deer are part of our community. The solution won't be a one-time fix, it will require continual management.

Financial resources are limited. All of FWP's funding comes from hunting and fishing licenses, they don't get any money from the general fund. They currently have a "Living with Wildlife" grant available – the filing deadline was June 15th. FWP gets many calls asking what they're doing about the deer. It's not just FWP's problem - they're part of the public trust.

Right now, collision with vehicles is the #1 method of dealing with deer.

They get diseases they don't get in the wild, which can be problematic if reintroduction.

They are prey to carnivores.

They can become aggressive.

If they are born in town, an urban setting is normal to them.

The task force:

Sees themselves as an avenue to facilitate community dialog.

Has applied for FWP "Living with Wildlife" grant.

They meet every other Thursday at noon in room 326.

At their June 29th meeting, they plan to review the different management options; regulated/controlled public hunts, contraception, sharp shooters, trap them and transplant to a different location, do nothing or some combination of these options.

Will make their first report to the City Commission on 7/17 and quarterly after that.

Conduct a public survey.

Will receive input at public forums (3, maybe more).

Review different strategies and formulate a proposal.

Forward their draft recommendation to the City Commission for comment.

Make their final recommendation to the City Commission by March 1, 2007.

Questions:

Is there a sharp shooter program in place right now? How do you address overpopulations and dangerous animals? The task force is addressing the population issues. Game wardens deal with dangerous animals on a case by case basis right now.

What have other communities done? What would you recommend Gayle?

The task force will look at the pros/cons of all the options presented.

Deer live 12 to 20 years, females longer than males. Birth control won't work for existing animals.

Transplanting assumes the animal has no impact where you move it to, which is wrong. And in the case of urban deer, it's cruel to transport them to wildlands.

There are problems associated with tranquilizing animals. Wardens worry about losing darts in the city – the drugs they use are very dangerous.

Controlled hunts within town can work in smaller communities, but not larger ones.

FWP wardens are good at their job, but we may have to consider contracting services to dispatch deer.

What about rescue operations? FWP won't take deer at their shelter anymore. Some animals are carrying tuberculosis, which is transmittable to humans.

Based on the possible diseases they carry, is harvesting for consumption really an option?

Yes it is. FWP already has a food bank distribution process.

Sick animals are easily identified.

However, tranquilized animals can't be eaten.

What are the costs involved with the various options?

The task force will begin looking at 7 or 8 options at their 6/29 meeting, but no costs are known at this time.

Comments:

Please remember that many people really love the deer. We need to recognize they do have a value in our community. Citizens need to be heard vs. focusing solely on ways to reduce/manage the deer population.

It sounds like the task force has a good plan. I appreciate that you're taking adequate time to consider the options, not rushing to judgment. This can be an emotional issue so it's important to have solid recommendations for the City Commission.

I think it's also important to keep the task force's work in the news. Not to sensationalize it, but so that the community is familiar with the process you're going through.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: No comments were offered.

CITY MEETING ASSIGNMENTS:

City Admin Meetings: 4-6pm

July 10; Marshall Gingery

July 26; Marshall Gingery

City Commission Meetings: 6pm –

July 17; Matthew Cohn

July 31; Mark McConnell

City Manager's Meeting: 10am -

July 8; Justin Trafton

Next HCC Meeting: 7 -9pm

July 26 – agenda to be determined.

Respectfully Submitted by Teresa Klotz, HCC Secretary, District