

Helena Citizen's Council
Regular Meeting
March 22, 2006

Members Present: Becky Bird, Lynne Boone, Jim Christnacht, Matthew Cohn, Mary Ann Dunwell, Marshall Gingery, Amy Glasscock, Bob Habeck, George Hoff, Teresa Klotz, Jan Lombardi, Mark McDonnell, Jerry McGee, Patty Rambo, Rebecca Ridenour, Bill Roberts, Ken Saunders, Jay Synness, Loyd Tracy, Justin Trafton, Jim Tucker Jr. and Thom Warsinski.

Members Absent: Ellen Bell, Laura Erickson, Tripp Hammer, Larry Mitchell, Allen Tompkins,

Visitors Present: Commissioners Peura and George McCauley.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The February 22, 2006 minutes were approved as submitted.

HELENA POLICE DEPT REPORT: Officers Jeseritz and Dellwo.

There were many people out for St. Patrick's Day, and we had extra officers patrolling. A few open container citations, a felony assault that was stopped almost immediately.

We're having an increase in stolen motor vehicles – mostly keys being left in cars. Not much damage, just joy riding and parking the vehicle elsewhere.

BB gun vandalism leads dried up with no resolution.

The Missouri River Drug Task Force:

Consists of 2 Helena police officers, 2 Lewis & Clark County Sheriffs, 1 member of the National Guard, and federal agents (FBI, Immigration) as needed.

Their purpose is to locate the supply and trace it to the source - they have a full plate of activity and cases. Their work is charged at the federal level.

Federal funding is slowly going away and the cost is shifting to local sources.

There is still meth in the Helena area, but it's in short supply which results in people turning to other drugs. Meth is currently selling for \$1200/oz, cocaine for \$820/oz and ¼ lb of marijuana for \$1050.

The biggest help has been the legislature's call to move the ingredients behind the counter at drug stores. The impact of the Montana Meth Project is unknown.

Underage drinking:

The police department has received several grants and has been doing compliance checks at local bars and convenience stores. When they started the program, compliance was at 80%. They did 23 checks over St. Patrick's Day weekend and had 100% compliance. This isn't the only source so kids are still getting booze.

The police are doing party patrols in the City and County.

They're also watching places kids hang out to see who is buying for them so they can stop them.

Before school lets out, there will be a big advertising campaign focusing on parents who host parties, thinking they're providing a safe place for kids to drink.

The police union has been working without a contract since July 2005. They are making progress.

Due to current staffing levels, officers have been primarily responding to calls and making reports. They will be trying a new shift approach that will provide an overlap of officers during peak hours so there will be more officers on the street during those times. This hasn't been tried before; they're hopeful it will help them be more proactive.

Questions for the Police Officers:

HCC members received an email regarding concerns with the proposed new prison (which has since died due to lack of funding) inviting an element of gang violence into Helena. Though we don't notice it much, there is gang activity in Helena – citizens have been a big help in deterring it. The Chief hasn't made an official statement, but anytime that element is brought in, there is always a risk.

What is the solution to loud cars driving around Helena? Our noise ordinance is complaint driven which means officers must have a complaint to act. They will always respond to noise complaints to try to quiet things down. To determine whether a citation will be issued, they must get a decibel meter reading to determine whether the ordinance is being violated.

Have you had any reports of an aggressive peddler in District 5? An elderly woman reported one to Thom Warsinki because it scared her. Thom reported it to the police, but wondered if there were additional reports. None that the officers knew of.

HCC TREASURER'S REPORT: At the end of February, we had \$998 remaining of our total annual budget of \$1565. The current fiscal year ends 6/30/2006.

OLD BUSINESS:

City Admin and Commission Meeting Proposal: Lynne Boone

Part of being an HCC member is attending City meetings. There are a total of 60 meetings to be covered each year (24 Commission, 24 Admin and 12 City Manager meetings). There are 27 of us, which averages out to apx 2 meetings per HCC member, per year – with 6 meetings left over. To free up time at the end of our meetings by eliminating the lengthy silence when we ask for volunteers to attend them, Lynne recommends the following.

That each HCC member will volunteer to attend at least 2 City meetings in a calendar year.

We'll schedule commitments in 6 month blocks of time; Jan through June, July through Dec.

If you can't get to the meeting you've volunteered to attend, you will find your own substitute or trade with another HCC member to make sure the meeting is covered.

This is retroactive to January 1, 2006 – so any meetings you've already been to will count toward your 2 meetings.

Lynne will organize building the calendar, and we'll try to get the schedule posted to our website so we'll have easy access for reminders and to find subs.

HCC members are welcome to attend any meeting, whether or not they're our designated rep.

Discussion:

It might be nice to have a list of those who schedules are more flexible – so we can call them first if we need a substitute.

It's also good to have more than one of us at these meetings, if that's possible. They're very informative, and we need a way to share it and bring the information back to the HCC.

If I know in advance that things affecting my district will be discussed – it might be more of a priority to juggle my schedule to be able to attend.

If there's an issue I want to follow through with, I may want to attend a series of meetings until the issue is resolved.

That each HCC member will volunteer to attend at least 2 City meetings in a calendar year.

Motion: To adopt Lynne's proposal as presented. Motion passed.

Motion: To monitor the effectiveness of this at our June HCC meeting. Motion passed.

NEW BUSINESS:

Quality of Life Issues: George McCauley has lived in Helena since 1993. In the face of growth, is it possible to maintain Helena's great quality of life? Why are we in such a hurry? George has talked to lots of people around town – not just in his neighborhood. The following are examples of common complaints he's heard (and he shares):

A basic lack of common courtesy; respect for the rights of others and ourselves.

Parking in handicap parking spots when you're not handicapped.

Taking right turns where there is no designated right turn lane.

Using cell phones while driving (some towns have successfully outlawed cell phone use while operating a vehicle).

Speeding in residential neighborhoods. Our posted speed limits are 25 mph, but the City Judge won't look at a ticket for less than 35 mph.

Our animal control officer is already overworked. Does 7000 new plats mean 7000 more cats and dogs? How many of those will run loose?

People not picking up after their dogs, clearing snow from their sidewalks.

Pesticide use and the resulting runoff into our ground water.

Excessive use of water to clean parking lots – when we live in a desert.

Not stopping for pedestrians, or even wheelchair-bound folks, at crosswalks.

Excessive noise – cars with booming stereos, lawn mowers, leaf blowers.

Our noise ordinance says from 6am to 11pm, 55 decibels in a residential area. Normal conversation is 50-60 decibels. Damage to hearing occurs at 85 decibels. Booming car stereos run at 145 decibels.

George would really like to see something happen with this– an ordinance change to make this more easily enforceable by law enforcement.

George would like to see Helena have some community standards of acceptable behavior. And he would like the HCC to consider hosting a town hall meeting, neighborhood meetings or something to get Helena citizens talking about these issues and find a way to introduce these ideas to the City administrative structure. If we don't want to pursue it, it won't go any further.

Discussion:

Several people weren't sure a town hall meeting is the best jumping off place.

How about a "Quality of Life" issue of the week discussion on HCTV?

Neighborhood meetings in District 2 (George's district), and other Districts?

In terms of elevating discussion, can you present this to other citizen groups as well, like Hometown Helena?

How do we energize citizens to attend; who will pay for it? George agrees people are reluctant to get involved – he can't even get them to call the police. Mayor Smith has told George that if the HCC recommends action be taken, the City will participate.

The community needs an opportunity to vision who we are/want to be. Our world is changing. I don't know Helena's demographics, and I'm interested in HCC doing some bigger picture visioning. Don't think a town hall meeting is the way, but what is the way to bring people out?

Hearing "community" and "standards" put together makes me nervous. "Community" is typically inclusive; "standards" typically exclusive. Kids driving "boom cars" aren't the only violators of the noise ordinance. I know adults who drive Harleys, etc. Noise levels will always be loud to some people. I lived in a community that imposed a restrictive noise ordinance, which just created a society of rebels who needed to make noise

An interesting thing is happening in Helena – increased interest and participation in HCC is an example. The annoyances George raises are reflective of a significant shift in values of this community – a real decline in courtesy and respect. This is a beneficial conversation to have. Bozeman, Kalispell and Missoula's growth got away from them – maybe Helena can do a better job. Be proactive rather than reactive.

As Commissioner Peura talks with people (campaigning and since he started serving), many people have expressed concerns similar to George's. He thinks HCC is the right body to address this, but isn't

sure a town hall meeting is the place to start. Compliance with complaint based ordinances is based on peer pressure. As Helena grows, we don't know each other/our neighbors - there is no peer pressure. It's easier to be less polite, not pick up after my dog, etc. Identifying community standards is the most important role the HCC plays. Are these important issues? What are the solutions – they may require funding? Are complaint based ordinances the best approach today

Action for April HCC meeting – think about whether/how you think the HCC should respond to this and be prepared to talk about it/present strategies at next month's HCC meeting.

¼ or ½ time City Staff for HCC Support: HCC has asked for a half-time dedicated City employee to help support our activities. 8 hours of Robyn Brown's work week is currently dedicated to support the HCC. We already have tacit approval for her to attend our monthly meeting, get in to the zoning and conditional use permit (CUP) loop to notify HCC reps ASAP of upcoming changes and organize neighborhood meetings. Justin suggests we work to fill at least 6 hours of Robyn's time each week. Where else do we need help/support?

A brainstorm of what we need someone to do for us resulted in the following list:

Be the identified contact for the HCC, to the public.

Tracking and scheduling our attendance at meetings.

Communications director; write weekly articles to the local papers.

Maintain our website.

Be the central point for HCC communication.

Liaison/Director/Coordinator

Maintain the monthly calendar of meetings.

Coordinate Neighborhood meetings.

Someone to manage systems. The HCC develops the system (communication, for example), but who coordinates the system, makes sure things get done?

We obviously have 2 issues to address; how to use the time Robyn is already dedicated for us, and a wish list of the areas where we'd like to receive support.

The end of the budget cycle is 1 month out; we have that long to iron-out the details.

It was made pretty clear to Justin that we're not in the running for a staffer for the 2007 fiscal year. But

we need to utilize the resources we already have available to us.

We need to be realistic and flexible; consider the above list from the perspective of what we can do for ourselves and what we really need help with

Action for April HCC meeting –

If you have further ideas, email them to Bob Habeck.

Bob will get a copy of the position descriptions for Robyn and the liaison for the Public Arts Committee. He'll combine the above list with the 2 PD's and email it to all of us for comment. (One PD based on Robyn's 8 hours, and one based on a 20 hour work week).

DISTRICT DISCUSSIONS:

We ran out of time. Please email any District or Committee reports you were hoping to give, to me (Teresa), and I'll consolidate them into one document and forward them via email to the full HCC

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Commissioner Peura announced City Government 101, a 3-session informational series designed to help bring Helena citizens into city government. All sessions will be held in the Commission Chambers from 7 to 8:30pm.

Structure of City Government - Monday April 17th

Scope of City Government - Monday May 1st

Hot Topics in City Government – Monday May 15th

Commissioner Peura asked whether the HCC wants to be involved in a city-wide spring cleanup day

the City Commission is discussing, for some Saturday most likely in May. Helena used to do spring cleanups but stopped for budgetary reasons. The financial outlay will be small - enough to support a collection point in each of the 7 HCC Districts. And our community will definitely benefit from a sprucing up.

Downtown Helena signs were approved at today's City Admin meeting - they look fantastic!

George Hoff has procured 9 CD copies of the Greater Helena Area Transportation Plan. Justin will give each HCC District Chair a copy to be shared with their member

CITY MEETING ASSIGNMENTS:

City Admin Meetings: 4-6pm

April 5; Marshall Gingery and Mark McDonnell

April 19; Teresa Klotz and Marshall Gingery

City Commission Meetings: 6pm -

March 27; George Hoff and Ken Saunders

April 10; Thom Warsinski

April 24; Rebecca Ridenour

City Manager's Meeting: 10am -

April 4; George Hoff and Justin Trafton

May 2; Becky Bird.

Next HCC Meeting: 7 -9pm

April 26th – agenda to be determined.

Respectfully Submitted by Teresa Klotz, HCC Secretary, District 3