

Helena Citizens Council Meeting Minutes

April 27, 2011

Members Present: Winston Greely, David Scrimm, Bobbette Madonna, Jim McCormick, Olivia Tooley, Ellen Bell, Randy Phillips, Roy Hemry, Albert Clark, M.C. Beeby, James Penner, Carrie Severson, Janet Hess-Herbert, John Forbes, Bob Habeck, Sande Wilson and Kris Goss.

Members Absent: Lorabelle Behlmer, Stanley Johnson, Bob Clarkson, Eric Woodland, Dan Bernhardt, Mark Seitz, Collin Watters, Eric Ball and Frank Rives.

Visitors: Helena Police Department (HPD) Officer Nathan Casey, City Community Development Director Sharon Haugen.

HCC Chair Jim McCormick called meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Approval of HCC minutes for March 2011

David Scrimm questioned some wording under the “public comment” section. The minutes will be verified and corrected for approval at the May meeting. **Note: The March minutes have been reviewed and a modified copy has been submitted for approval at the May 25, 2011 monthly meeting.**

Helena Police Department Report: Officer Casey reported snow shoveling enforcement went well and now the HPD will be focusing on speeding issues that happen when the weather gets nice. The speed trailer will be brought out and put at high traffic/excessive speed areas. The trailer is set up in the morning and taken down in the evening. Use of the trailer is in addition to extra patrol in problem areas. The speed trailer can be set up in areas requested by constituents. To request a location for the trailer, contact Captain Roger Johnson through the HPD office at 447-8479.

David Scrimm mentioned that pulling out of the Capitol complex on Broadway is not very safe due to parked cars. Officer Casey stated as far as enforcement goes, there is nothing the HPD can do unless there are painted yellow curbs or no parking signs posted. If there is a legitimate concern, those requests can go to the Street Department. They will send a representative out to see if there is a valid concern to put a no parking section in the problem area. However, there may also be complaints by state workers about the loss of parking spaces. Changes to parking, speed limits, etc. must be studied by city staff then approved by the City Commission. Bobbette Madonna requested a speed trailer at Davis and Broadway.

David Scrimm also asked about low hanging branches over sidewalks. Code Enforcement Officer Greta Dige is the person to contact; she can be reached at 447-8458.

Randy Phillips requested additional HPD presence at Four Georgians School. He explained once the police presence is gone, the drivers go back to poor driving, running stop lights and almost hitting children. Officer Casey noted he would make the request.

Sande Wilson asked if there are traffic cameras anywhere in Helena. Officer Casey explained no, the devices on the street lights are there to sense traffic, not to take photographs.

Guest Speaker:

Helena Housing Needs Assessment - Community Development Director Sharon Haugen introduced the Needs Assessment and provided handouts on the study to the Council.

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The Housing Needs Assessment was a combined effort with the City of Helena, Helena Association of Realtors, Helena Building Industry Association, Rocky Mountain Development Council, Helena Housing Authority, several banks, and some appraisers and general realtors. A Montana consultant was hired to work on the assessment, determining the housing needs for low income as well as residents in different age groups. A complete copy of the Needs Assessment can be found on the following websites: City Community Development Department, Helena Realtors Association, Rocky Mountain Development Council and Housing Authority.

Affordability continues to be an issue in the Helena community. Although Lewis and Clark County has the third or fourth highest median income in the state, our housing prices are equally as high. We have a higher median income than the Gallatin and Missoula counties. Oil counties are picking up, Jefferson and Park Counties are also high. This gap continues to be a big concern. The low to moderate income gap continues to be a concern. Senior citizens on fixed incomes are facing the cost burden. It is projected that by the year 2025, seniors will be spending 55-65% of their gross income on housing.

More rentals are being permitted this year. Starting to catch up, yet there is still a shortage of rental housing. There is a huge need for more rentals, both for low/moderate income and people in general. Helena Housing Authority- Section 8 housing has a 6 to 8 month waiting period. The minimum wait is 6-8 months, sometimes up to a year depending on the size of an apartment wanted or needed. There will be a need for about 200-300 new single family homes per year in the next ten years in Lewis and Clark County.

In 2006 there were 400 housing starts in the county. It is believed that there will still be a housing shortfall. In addition to the new houses being built, there are some houses that are reaching obsolescence. Some existing units are considered so sub-standard that they may no longer be in service. Jim McCormick asked if there are any areas that have a greater need for housing than others. Ms. Haugen said that this has not been identified. People taking the housing survey did not identify themselves by HCC districts. On another date, they can show information that shows the age and condition of housing as determined by the Department of Revenue. In another year, when the Census information is available, this information will be revealed as well.

There is some housing in Helena that doesn't have plumbing. More people are leaning toward greener housing, such as energy efficiency. LIEAP is seeing a lot of demand. With energy costs rising, we'll probably see that need increase.

More people are looking to downsize from larger homes. The aging population is looking for single level living. This trend has been going on in Helena for a while now. Smaller starter homes are a more marketable too. The two primary subdivisions with new housing are Mountain View Meadows and Stone Meadows Subdivisions. Average cost for these houses is \$175,000.00 to \$200,000.00. The cost is significantly less than other housing being built, primarily because they are downsized. The average homes in Stone Meadows have floor plans that start at around 850 square feet for single family home

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with an unfinished basement. At Mountain View Meadows, the smallest house plan starts at just below 1,000 square feet.

More demand for special need housing. A special need is classified as neglected children, domestic violence victims, disabled, and frail elderly. Also homeless and transitional people are included in this category. There currently isn't an emergency shelter for women, or women with children in Helena. The YWCA can take you in if you do not have a male child above the age of 6; by charter they cannot serve males. God's Love is primarily single males in the main floor. There is a transitional center upstairs with only nine units. There is a program going on called Family Promise. The program houses green families in churches overnight as an emergency housing option.

Housing sales have declined, as well as building permits. The City of Helena did not decline as many permits. In 2010 we were the only major city in Montana to see an increase in building permits. This year we are seeing a trend that matches everyone else. There is a decrease in sub-division activity. There hasn't been a major sub-division in the city limits since January 1st. Spec homes are no longer being built. Housing is being built as financing is approved.

20% of homeless are Veterans. Less than 10% are female Veterans. They are staying at God's Love and couch surfing. There is a higher number staying in cars and in the woods. There is a voucher program for hotels in emergency situations. There are two organizations in Helena to address housing issues.

The Helena Area Housing Task Force meets once per month with guest speakers every month.

HATCH – Coalition of service providers in the city and local government that discuss homeless issues. There is a first time homebuyer program in Helena. Over 1000 first time homebuyers have been graduated.

Rocky Mountain Development Council is looking to do a multi-family housing project in the Skeleton Subdivision – approximately 32 units. They have been ranked in public housing tax credit, with a couple of applications for other grants. Rocky has also approached the Board of County Commissioners who is sponsoring a grant for the CAIRD property; they requested 2.3 million dollars.

The YWCA is currently going through a preliminary architectural report to determine what needs to be done to rehab their building. It's old and needs a lot of work. This could be a multi-million dollar project. The Housing Authority is in the processes of updating Stuart Homes. They are developing a master plan for the updating. They are also looking at their other housing units throughout the community. The project will primarily affect Stuart Homes as well as the other scattered sites (approximately 100).

The City of Helena has been selected by the EPA to do a walking audit. This will be done in the area by the 6th ward, which includes Bryant Elementary, Helena High School, the Helena Housing Authority and the Helena College of Technology. The purpose is to look at the streetscape and how well it works, as

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well as how it can be fixed. This is from a fiscal standpoint. HCC members are invited to go along for the two hour walkabout, followed by workshop to discuss observations. The number of people that can go along is limited. Information about the walkabout will be sent to Jim McCormick. This will happen on May 26th.

District Reports

District 1: There are 2 openings for district reps. Janet "may" be filling one of the two open seats, depending on her housing situation. She currently serves in 7, but lives in six.

District 2: There are two vacancies. Mr. Clarkson did not show up as promised tonight. Mr. Johnson doesn't have a telephone or e-mail address to be contacted. David Scrimm's only choice is to visit him personally.

District 3: There are no vacancies. There is however one member who is frequently absent.

District 4: There is one opening. Benton Avenue Cemetery is having their annual clean up in May.

District 5: Full

District 6: One possibly.

District 7: Full until Janet is adopted by District 1.

Standing Committee Reports/Various Boards and Committee Reports:

Marketing Committee: None

Finance/Budget Committee: John Forbes stated that the HCC budget is \$20,152.00. We have spent \$1,231.00 to date with \$18,921.00 remaining. Last month \$18.00 was spent for postage. We are under spending because we don't have a VISTA/admin support person. We are way below budget overall, except for postage, which has been overspent by \$2.00. The main reason for the under spending is that we don't have an admin support person.

The city's budget meeting was attended by John Forbes and Ellen Bell.

Joint City/County budget: Commissioners from both the city and county attended this meeting. Each group presented their budget and what they are requesting from the city and county. Refer to John's notes which have been e-mailed to all for further details.

David Scrimm noted that we are paying for IT service and the HCC website needs to be updated. He made a formal request to have the information updated.

HCC Staffing Subcommittee: Jim Penner reported that the VISTA application was denied. Reason given is that it did not tie in enough to alleviating poverty and reducing risky behavior by youth.

House and Congress did not include the VISTA program for 2013.

City Commission and Administrative Meeting Reports: Janet attended the Administrative meeting on April 6th. The commission meeting report for April 25th was given by Olivia. Kris Goss gave Administrative meeting report for April 20th.

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Other Committees/Boards:

Inter-governmental Transit Committee report given by Kris Goss. They are in the process of naming the new transportation facility, due to open the end of May. One recommendation was to name it the Max Baucus Facility, which was rejected. Kris offered the services of HCC to help with soliciting citizen input for possible names. There is a question as to whether there is a requirement to name building after a person, or if generic names are acceptable.

City/County Library Board – Sande Wilson reported the concession stand in the lobby will be operational very soon.

Randy Phillips reported that his company will be buying abandoned vehicles from the city. The contract is in the works. Right now the city is paying to get rid of abandoned vehicles, whereas they will now be getting paid for them. This will create an influx of revenue into the city, rather than out. Randy will not be in attendance for the May HCC meeting, so he won't be able to report on the progress of the contract. He requested either someone to contact the City Manager for an update, or to have this added to the June agenda.

Unfinished Business & General Order(s):

Reduction in frequency of HCC report to Commission - To reiterate David Scrimm's suggestion from last month; the HCC does not need to attend the 2nd Commission Meeting of the month because the council has nothing to report. Janet suggested that we hold off doing this, until we know how the committee/board integration goes. Winston suggested that we continue with the second meeting attendance so that we as the HCC continue to receive information from the Commission. We may not have anything to report, but we do come away with information.

City-HCC Board & Committee Integration Proposal - Chair Jim McCormick briefed HCC members on the intent to move forward with a six month trial period. In response to Randy Phillips's question as to why HOLMAC is not included in the MOU, Chair McCormick replied that the members of HOLMAC aggressively resisted the idea.

Motion: John Forbes moved the HCC adopt the MOU with the City of Helena with the integration of the committees noted in the document. Kris Goss seconded the motion. Motion carried 9 to 6 with two abstentions.

A subcommittee will be formed to implement the process. The members are: Kris Goss, Bobbette Madonna, Janet Hess-Herbert and Chair McCormick.

New Business:

Public Service Announcements- Chair McCormick is working on the public service announcements with Debbie Havens to announce HCC vacancies and projects, to be put in print and radio.

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The next meeting speaker will be City Parks & Recreation Director Amy Teegarden.

Announcements: Olivia will not be here for the May meeting. Bob Habeck has volunteered to take the minutes.

Upcoming Meetings

Administrative Meetings – Wednesday 4:00 p.m.

May 4, 2011 – Kris Goss

May 18, 2011 – Olivia Tooley

City Commission Meetings – Monday 6:00 p.m.

May 9, 2011 – David Scrimm

May 23, 2011 – Roy Henry

Meeting adjourned at 9:13 p.m.