

**State of the City Address**  
**Mayor Wilmot J. Collins**  
**City of Helena, Montana**  
**January 27, 2020**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the annual State of the City Address. The City Charter states:

“The mayor shall communicate to the city commission and to the general public, a statement of the affairs and management of the city, each January, and may make recommendations regarding these matters.”

Our City Charter was adopted in 1976 and it states, “Helena, Montana, is the proud seat of our state government. It is a community with a colorful past and a vibrant future. There is an openness and basic decency that beckons each of our citizens to contribute to its unique identity.”

This beautiful city is governed by a diverse, hard-working city commission. I would like to begin by welcoming Commissioner Logan and Commissioner Dean. We welcome you and we’re looking forward to another busy and successful year.

I also want to thank and recognize all city employees for all they’ve done to contribute to the success of this city.

The city commission and city staff are two parts that make the city what it is. However, we could not accomplish all we do without the various advisory boards. I want to recognize the members of the various advisory boards; they give hundreds of hours of free time to make this City run. We thank you. I also want to especially recognize the members of the Helena Citizens’ Council (HCC). This City Commission sincerely appreciates all your hard work.

It is time we acknowledge the fact that Helena has a vibrant business community; therefore, we must support those policies and initiatives that will continue to develop a strong and diverse economy.

It is very important that we recognize the day-to-day work of the City and not take it for granted. We continue to deliver essential services to our community of Helena: plowing the streets, fixing potholes, responding to emergency calls, patrolling the community, collecting garbage, etc. However; I also want to recognize several accomplishments for 2019:

This address recognizes key accomplishments in 2019; we reflect on the successes and shed light to recognize the public private partnerships that facilitated these outcomes. This address also outlines what's to come; the impacts we elected officials, our administrators and your public servants will diligently work towards in 2020.

By responsibly using public funds, by carefully crafting public policy, I and the Commission will improve the livability of our beautiful city. How? By carefully managing our parks, streets, utilities and public infrastructure. We will continue to enhance our quality of life by creatively tackling housing needs, managing growth, enhancing public transit and developing a thriving downtown. We will continue improving our public infrastructure through specific construction projects including many recreation amenities. We will respect the environment by tirelessly working towards sustainability through new recycling in city parks, new LED through the city, water conservation and protection of water quality. We will embrace new ways for providing excellent customer service. We will find organizational efficiencies to be more responsive to you and to be smarter in how we conduct business. We will grab every opportunity to increase communication and transparency so that you can hold us accountable. We will be humble and learn from our mistakes and in doing so, articulate how we will prevent making the same mistake twice; we learned lessons in 2019.

In short, our vision for 2020 is to serve the residents of this city with customer service second to none, to improve community conditions for residents and merchants, to improve our public facilities and assets with special focus to our parks and open space and to do so by being good stewards of the environment and public funds.

I will also highlight some of the 2019 accomplishments and 2020 goals from each of the city departments:

### **Some 2019 Accomplishments**

#### **City Attorney**

1. Successfully hosted a United States Department of Justice visit and tour of our prosecution-based Victim Services Program.

#### **Community Development**

2. In partnership with the County, created a Housing Navigator position
3. Worked with MBAC to obtain a Big Sky Trust fund grant for Big Sky Connect, an electronic health information exchange (HIE) allows doctors, nurses, other care team members involved in a patient's care to appropriately access and securely share a patient's vital medical information electronically. This is the first one in Montana

#### **Facilities**

4. Converted majority of the general lighting at the Civic Center and Main Fire station to energy efficient LED lights.
5. Remodeled the North portion of the Law & Justice Center facility; the Police Department, Sheriff's Office, Coroner's Office, and Criminal Justice Services have moved into the facility.
6. Completed the design phase of the City-County Building ADA parking lot upgrades.

#### **Finance**

7. City received its 31<sup>st</sup> consecutive Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officer Association for our fiscal 2018 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.
8. Financing was obtained for the following 3 City projects:
  - a. Sewer infrastructure to service newly annexed properties on the Westside. Financing was through a DNRC funded tax-exempt bond.
  - b. Upgrades and replacement of the water transmission main from the Ten Mile water treatment plant to town. Financing for this project was also through a DNRC tax-exempt bond.
  - c. Downtown parking improvements. Financing was through a loan with the **Montana Board of Investments INTERCAP Program.**

## **Fire**

9. The City of Helena COOP is near completion.
10. Fort Harrison emergency response contract was completed, bringing in \$317,000 yearly into the Fire Department's budget.
11. Fire Prevention and Investigation Bureau Inspections; existing buildings 529, new construction 142.

## **Human Resources**

12. A few college and high school interns were brought in for the summer and the HR office is working on designing a more comprehensive program to include other nearby colleges

## **Municipal Court**

13. The court welcomed Judge Anne Peterson to Helena Municipal Court. Judge Peterson has hit the ground running and has already made changes which improve the daily workings of the court and provide better service to court customers.

## **Parks, Recreation & Open Lands**

14. Open Lands is close to completing an update of the recreation chapter of the Open Lands Management Plan, an almost 8-month process that has involved and engaged diverse interested parties. The process has brought competing user groups together to form common goals and understanding and will provide the department a framework for future recreation management on Open Lands.
15. Open Lands also gain almost 100 acres of new land, the Whyte Property, next Mt Helena and worked primarily on fuels reduction next to homes.
16. The Parks Division worked with Kiwanis and a grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to construct a new poured-in-place, highly accessible, playground in Cherry Park.
17. The recreation program transformed, and grew, the Kay's Kids free summer camp program with substantive programming and activities and high-quality management and staffing.

## **The Civic Center**

18. significantly increased their programming and revenue, bringing in new and diverse shows, bookings and partnerships.
19. Through removals and re-plantings, we reduced the green ash population from 54.3% to 52% and completed extensive pruning on streets lined with large mature trees and small trees for formative pruning.

## **Police**

20. Move to 406 Fuller from 221 Breckenridge
  - Completion of a 15-month process with City and County Staff after Jail Levy passed
  - Most furniture donated by BCBS of MT and other entities
  - Significant portion of move completed by HPD staff at no additional cost to city
  - Open house with over 200 attendees
21. Deployment of Full-Time Traffic Unit
  - First full year of DUI Enforcement Officer Pilot Project-funded by Montana DOT/HTS
  - 146 DUI arrests and 593 citations in first year (October 2018 inception)

- 2 Officers Assigned to Traffic Unit
- traffic enforcement and crash investigation

#### 22. Downtown Bike Unit

- Two officer full-time downtown June-October
- Grant from Walmart for 2 additional bikes
- One Officer attend Police Bike training so in-house training can be conducted

#### 23. Community Involvement

- Shop with a Cop-50 Children shopped with
- Beard for Charity-\$1000.00 donated to local charities
- 5 Coffee with a Cop events
- Preparedness Fair
- Life Saving award for on adult through MACOP
- Life Saving Award for 8-year-old who called 911 and saved mother life

### **Public Information Officer**

24. City events, road closures, upcoming projects, and more are communicated through Facebook and Twitter, which supports a more informed citizenry. Media has learned to follow our accounts for story ideas.
25. Video production, a skill of the PIO, is frequently used to communicate complex information. Video has been used to inform drivers of the raised intersection on Neill Ave, where the City's water sources come from, parking options for downtown, to promote the Too Toxic to Trash Hazardous Waste Collection event, and so much more.

### **Public Works**

26. The Engineering Department completed or reviewed approximately 30 infrastructure projects last year totaling approximately \$15 Million dollars
27. The major projects completed last year are as follows:

28. Front Street – Reconstruction of Front Street storm water mains, water main, and the street from Neil Ave to Lyndale Ave. Includes pedestrian improvements such as bulb-outs and a raised intersection. - \$5 Million
29. Fee Street Sidewalks – The installation and completion of sidewalks on Fee Street next to Days Inn and Albertson’s provides pedestrian conductivity from Prospect to 11th and allows better access to health care at Pureview - \$30,000
30. Utility Maintenance Division successfully implemented the city’s new Service Line Replacement Loan programs. Completed \$83,223.7 in loans with more currently in process.
31. Replaced over 2 miles of the main water line coming to town from the Ten Mile Water Treatment Plant. Even with limited post construction data we can see large water savings for replacing the leaking main line.
32. Installed a liner in the 132-year-old Hale Water tank structure. It was estimated this project will save Helena 60-70,000 gallons of water per day that was leaking out of the reservoir. This project was over-seen by Engineering, but assistance was needed from both the Water Treatment and Utility Maintenance Divisions.
33. The implementation of a Recycling area attendant at the Transfer Station has been well received. It has greatly helped with customer questions and overall recycling education.
34. Successfully handled 166,406 customer transactions through scales at the Transfer Station– Jan 2 through Dec 10.

### **Transportation Systems**

35. Resurfaced Airport Road.
36. Developed and implemented My Helena App for use by citizens to submit service requests.
37. Implemented CityWorks for operational tracking through work orders.
38. Acquired 3-4x4 dedicated snow plows, bought quality used vehicles to save taxpayer money.
39. Acquired new snow blower which has increased efficiency of snow removal operations.

40. Installation of 22 ADA parking spaces downtown.
41. Ran pilot trolley project during the month of August with great success.
42. Installation of new parking equipment including on-street Kiosk and Single Space meters, credit card capable and implementation of a mobile parking app. & enforcement module upgrades.
43. Jackson Street Garage lighting project replaced 20- year old fluorescents with LED Lighting with occupancy sensors.
44. Increased from one to two Roadway Code Enforcement Officers.

### **Utility Maintenance**

45. UCS receives payments daily through mail, in person, online payments, electronic transfer and over the phone. During a typical month this office processes an average of over 9,000 payments totaling over \$1,000,000.
46. UCS currently offers customers the option of budget billing as well as automatic payment withdrawals.

### **2020 Priorities (Goals)**

#### City Attorney

1. Complete overhaul of animal control ordinance with a new non-criminal enforcement component.
2. Pretrial diversion program.
3. Working with HPD, Municipal Court, and the Office of the Public Defender to implement a paperless criminal justice system.

#### **Community Development**

4. Work with Trust Montana to establish a community land trust and identify City surplus parcels to be set aside for the land trust
5. Create a Capitol Hill Mall Area Urban Renewal District

6. Work with new owners on the rehabilitation of the Fire tower (Serendipity Apartments)
7. Working with Tri-County Fire, the County, and others, the division will be looking at considering the possible adoption of the WUI codes
8. Possible future project 2020
  - a. First Assembly of God – future addition/renovation
  - b. St. Peter's Health – new ambulance garage and several additions & remodels
  - c. Valley Bank at 3171 N Montana – possible change of use to restaurant
  - d. Old bus depot lot / Seeley Building - 630 NLCG - New Mixed-use Building
  - e. Corner of North Last Chance Gulch and W 15th St - New Mixed-use Building
  - f. The rehabilitation of the Fire tower apartments

### **Facilities**

9. Reconstruction of the North City-County Building parking lot to comply with ADA regulations.

### **Finance**

10. Developing consolidated finance, budget, and procurement policy and procedures manual(s).
11. Quarterly financial reports to commission on funds that are relevant to them, or that need their attention.

### **Fire**

47. Complete a Continuity of Government Operations exercise including the City of Helena/Lewis & Clark County and DES.
48. Perform a workload analysis in the FPIB, to determine if there is a need and funding available, to expand the Bureau in support of the 2012 International

WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE CODE (IWUIC) and other basic building inspections.

### **Human Resources**

49. HR will work with departments on developing and implementing succession planning

### **Municipal Court**

50. Work closely with the City for a smooth transition out of the Court House and into the Law & Justice building.

### **Parks, Recreation and Open Lands**

51. The Parks Division will be working with the Historic Preservation Office to secure grant funding to restore the damaged wood beams on the Fire tower at Fire tower Park.

52. The recreation program will be working to identify and activate public spaces through a partnership with Montana State University's Architecture program.

53. In 2020, Civic Center will continue to focus on programming and exploring new partnerships with a formal request for interest from outside entities. The request for interest is looking for potential third-party operators, partnership promoters, food and beverage management, and naming rights.

54. In 2020 Urban Forestry will continue the DNRC grant project to further diversify the urban canopy.

### **Police**

55. Citizen Police Academy

-approximately 25 participants

-Spring 2020

-Organized by Civilian Volunteer

### **Public Information Officer**

56. The PIO has a goal of February 1, 2020 to create a monthly marketing calendar. Having served as PIO for six months (as of January 15, 2020), the PIO will have a sense of future and past communications based on seasonality of departments.
57. Efforts to maintain communications via social media to increase and engage followers will continue. The PIO would love to see the City's numbers increase to 4,000+. The following cities with Facebook accounts have the following numbers: City of Bozeman – 2,625 followers, City of Kalispell – 6,465, City of Billings Public Works – 4,538 followers, City of Great Falls – 1,325 followers.

### **Public Works**

58. Westside Water and Sewer Main Extension Phase 1 and 2 – The project is to provide water and sewer main to the newly annexed properties on the Westside of Helena
59. The City has a significant ground water reservation for the deep aquifer, an aquifer not used by the average resident, in the Helena Valley. Water Treatment Division will drill test wells in the deep aquifer to inform our decision on where to place full production public water supply wells. The groundwater supply has the potential to provide superior water in taste, resiliency from contaminants, reliability, and cost.
60. The Transfer Station plans on expanding recycling drop-off sites to promote customer convenience.

### **Transportation Systems**

61. Expand snow removal services by 49%, around the Capital and other commercial areas.
62. Increase efficiency on striping and pavement markings.
63. Continued discussion on improvements to the transit system.

### **Utility Maintenance**

64. Utility Customer Services Division has just begun to offer E-notifications of the customer's monthly billing info. E-notices allow the customer the convenience to

receive an email that provides them with the monthly bill amount and other pertinent information as well as the link to the online payment portal.

## **CONCLUSION**

Helena continues to work with many partners, including Lewis & Clark County, the State of Montana, the city of East Helena, YMCA, Helena Food Share, National Forest Service, Helena Housing Authority, Rocky Mountain Development Council, United Way, Helena Regional Airport, and many others giving of their time and energy. While we continue to work with our partners to improve our growing city, we must recognize the great deal of work that is ahead of us. We must boldly tackle tough issues, such as affordable housing for our vulnerable populations, and public safety, while still reflecting the principles and charitable character of our citizens. Together, with our partners, we will accomplish these goals and more, while still tending to our fiscal responsibilities and in service to those who entrusted these decisions to us.

As the City Charter states, Helena is the proud seat of our state government, and as such, it should strive to be the model for the future of our great state. Ladies and Gentlemen the state of affairs of the city is strong.

I thank you all and I am looking forward to serving you in the years to come. God Bless this City, State and these United States.