

CITY OF HELENA
SPECIAL CITY COMMISSION MEETING
April 8, 2020 – 3:00 p.m.

Zoom Online Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/4129664351>

Time & Place

A special City Commission meeting was held on Wednesday, April 8, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. via Zoom Online Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/4129664351>.

***Call to Order
and Roll Call***

Mayor Collins, Commissioner Haladay, Commissioner Dean, Commissioner Logan, Commissioner O'Loughlin, Interim City Manager Reed, City Attorney Jodoin, and Interim City Clerk Clayborn all responded present.

***Pledge of
Allegiance***

Mayor Collins asked those present to please stand and join him in the Pledge of Allegiance.

***Communications
from Commissioners***

There were none.

***Report of the
City Manager***

Interim City Manager Reed made comments on a joint City-County meeting she attended to discuss cost-sharing of COVID-19 expenses. She asked for direction on how best to move forward with the County proposal to allocate \$25,000 to the city to cover overflow housing costs for the homeless population. She asked if the Commission would recommend using this money only for those who are uninfected, what would the plan be for those who tested positive, and if it should only be used for FEMA-approved projects? Manager Reed proposed placing the discussion on the April 15, 2020 administrative meeting for further consideration.

Discussion

Commissioner O'Loughlin said that she was in favor of following whatever provisions the County sets out and she supports moving forward with FEMA-approved expenditures.

Commissioner Dean agreed and added that it is a fluid situation that may not allow much time to react as the emergency grows. She would like to give the City Manager some discretion and flexibility if necessary owing to delays on the part of FEMA.

Commissioner Logan said he agreed with the former comments and giving the City Manager some discretion.

Commissioner Haladay said he agreed that the Commission needs to provide support to the Manager, but he has some concerns about the amount of information they're getting. He wants more information regarding an explanation of costs, expected timelines, and a clearer picture of how the money would be used.

Mayor Collins said he would approve funding for all FEMA projects and wants to direct the Manager to move forward following the discussion at the next meeting.

Commissioner O'Loughlin said she would like to discuss it further at a meeting including County directors Reese Martin and Drenda Niemann so they can answer questions. She wants to discuss how the projects will benefit specific populations.

Mayor Collins asked Manager Reed to invite the County representatives to a joint meeting.

Commissioner Dean asked for a broader discussion that would include other aspects of care than shelter, such as providing food and mental health care services, since non-profits can't provide all the assistance that's needed.

Mayor Collins asked for further comments; there were none. He moved to go on to the Regular Agenda.

Regular Agenda

A. PERMANENT CITY MANAGER RECRUITMENT – NOVAK GROUP.

Staff Report

Jennifer Riechelt of the Novak Group presented project plans, including a discussion of the recruitment plan, the candidate profile, first year goals for the manager, and a community survey.

The recruitment plan outlined places to advertise, key dates, and the interview process. They intend to use a community survey and focus groups to make the candidate profile and first year goals more complete. They will be posting the position in May, reviewing candidates in June, and doing interviews in July. City Attorney Jodoin confirmed to them that the review process can take place in a closed session because they would be discussing private and personnel issues. Ms. Riechelt described the previous process used. She said they have three press releases planned to involve and inform the community. She gave a total advertising cost of \$2,300 and said they planned to target applicants from the northwest.

She presented a preliminary list of minimum and preferred qualifications and discussed a tentative salary range based on similar positions in Montana and northwestern states. She recommended they raise the upper range to give themselves flexibility to negotiate.

She explained that the first year's goals should be created carefully since it's an accountability tool but also a means to let potential candidates better understand the City's priorities.

Discussion

Commissioner Dean said she would like to include a community stakeholder panel during the interview to ask questions. Ms. Riechelt cautioned that they can incorporate it into the process but it should be clear to them that they're merely helping form a decision, not making it.

Mayor Collins asked about the significance of the community survey. Ms. Riechelt said it's a means to ensure that community needs are brought into the process, and that it's not necessary but is a good tool.

Commission Haladay wondered if the Commission would be tasked with identifying community leaders and asked Commissioner Dean how she envisioned the process. Commissioner Dean recommended they select people deeply involved in community affairs that represent a diverse population.

Ms. Riechelt asked if anyone had feedback regarding the advertising process and budget.

Commissioner Haladay requested a due date for Commission feedback; Ms. Riechelt recommended the upcoming Friday so they could get the survey out on Monday. Mayor Collins asked how long people would have to complete it; Ms.

Riechelt recommended two weeks. Mayor Collins inquired if the survey would apply only to City of Helena residents, or those living outside the city limits too. Ms. Riechelt said it would be beneficial to allow everyone with an interest to comment, and they could compare responses from City and outside residents.

Commissioner Logan asked what role city employees will have in the process. Ms. Riechelt said they can complete the survey and that they could involve a leadership team of department directors to be a part of the interview process. Commissioner O'Loughlin asked about the participation of lower level staff and suggested that candidates have the opportunity to interact with them in a relaxed setting, such as a tour of the community, as they could provide helpful input.

Commissioner O'Loughlin recommended that the Commission discuss the first year goals, public process, and salary among themselves rather than submitting individual feedback to Ms. Riechelt.

Ms. Riechelt suggested that the Commission should try to come to an agreement during this meeting regarding the proposed minimum and preferred qualifications and the salary range. She said they can discuss goals later in the process.

Commissioner O'Loughlin asked if the required qualifications are consistent with those of the previous recruitment process and how to handle applicants from the local community who may not have the exact minimum requirements. Commissioner Haladay asked if they can add language that broadens the scope of acceptable experience to allow people whose work experience will translate well to this position even if they don't have the exact qualifications. Ms. Riechelt said they can, but they should ensure that their experience is with similar organizations to local government. Commissioner O'Loughlin asked the other commissioners if they agreed on the idea of broadening the language. Commissioners Dean and Logan agreed that the language could be broadened as long as it still requires experience working with local government in some capacity.

Ms. Riechelt began a discussion about the proposed salary range and explained the criteria used to determine it. She recommended asking applicants for their current salary as a screening question, but pointed out the cost of living in Helena allows less flexibility than some other areas in the state. Mayor Collins asked if there were any objections or comments on the salary range; there were none.

Ms. Riechelt went through 15 first year goals, noting that since the list is lengthy it might be beneficial to expand the period to 16 months or even 24 instead of 12. There was a brief discussion of the proposed growth policy and what role the new manager would play, such as acting as an urban renewal manager. Ms. Riechelt recommended extending the timetable to 24 months in order to stress listening and learning more about Helena and the city organization before making changes.

Commissioner Haladay asked about facilitating an organization climate assessment and recommended not assigning that task to the new manager. Commissioner O'Loughlin agreed that the issue needs more discussion and the language should be more general and be geared at building strong relationships with directors and staff. Commissioner Logan recommended leaving it to the new manager to take the initiative. Ms. Riechelt said she could make the language less exact while stressing the need to assess organization culture while taking direction from the Commission.

Ms. Riechelt asked the commissioners to relay any suggested changes to the community survey and they will conduct focus groups to gather feedback. She plans to get the information back by early May.

Commissioner O'Loughlin initiated a discussion on the plan timeline. She asked what the review process would entail and what should be made public. Ms. Riechelt said that City Attorney Jodoin confirmed that the commission can review applicant materials as a team in a closed session. Once the top names are selected they will be made public. Interviews will be public but deliberations can be made in private.

There was a brief discussion of how many review rounds were needed and who would participate. Mayor Collins noted that bringing out 6 candidates for interviews would be very expensive and recommended using Skype interviews to narrow the final pool to 4 candidates.

Commissioner O'Loughlin asked at what point candidate names will be made public and stressed caution due to privacy concerns about current employment. Ms. Riechelt explained that she contacts candidates and gives them enough time to inform their employers of their interview plans. She also said she must provide notice that candidate deliberations will be held in executive session so candidates can opt out if they want.

Mayor Collins asked if there are further comments; there were none.

Public Communications Mayor Collins called for public comment on the agenda item.

Sumner Sharpe (621 Holter) noted that some private sector workers have extensive experience working with local governments and agreed that expanding the minimum qualifications to include these people will provide a better applicant pool. He agreed with Commissioner Dean's suggestion of including other stakeholders in the interview process, including members of the Helena Citizens Council (HCC), small business owners, and representatives from the non-profit sector. He recommended looking for a manager who has experience in implementing urban renewal measures, rather than an "expert." He discussed the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on city finances and thought they should ask candidates how they would deal with that. He said HCC members would have comments on the Novak Group's brochure and asked who to send them to (Interim City Clerk Clayborn). Mr. Sharpe recommended that vetting should include interviews with people who know the applicant, not just relying on written references.

Ms. Riechelt confirmed that they do intensive vetting, including internet and social media searches, articles, background checks, and reference checks with specific individuals.

Mayor Collins ask for further comments from the commission and the public; there were none. He opened the discussion up for general comments.

Brian Miller (563 3rd St.) said he thinks the decision to open the municipal golf course should be reversed because the city is entering the peak phase of the pandemic, and opening the course increases the number of transmission points. He discussed an article on MSN about the measures taken in New Zealand to fight the pandemic and noted that immediate lockdown for two cycles brought the

virus spread to a halt. He feels the City is doing the opposite. He believes extra caution is needed because the State doesn't have adequate testing resources to determine the true extent of COVID-19 exposure. The City Commission is sending mixed messages and not setting a good example by asking small businesses to stay closed while opening the golf course. He asked to know specifically whose idea it was to open the golf course and if County department head Drenda Niemann approved the idea. He further asked for a written set of protocols regarding practices at the course. Mr. Miller indicated he will file a lawsuit to close the course in the interest of public health and safety. He wished this to be considered proper notice to the City. He also recommended that the City work with the small business community to work out a plan to get back to business. He concluded that there may be a second wave of the virus in the fall and that opening the golf course is an error that will jeopardize the community.

Dr. Greg Thomas (no address given) returned to the topic of city manager recruitment and stressed the need for an organization climate assessment, noting that city employees had shared their thoughts with him about their positions in city government and their ability to interact with supervisors and management. He feels there is a critical need for an assessment under the purview of the Commission. He asked if he could work with Interim Clerk Clayborn to place an item on an upcoming agenda in April or May for further discussion and so that pricing for an assessment could be provided and funds allocated by the Commission.

Dr. Thomas stated that with the COVID-19 crisis cyber security is more important than ever. He will give copies of the revised insurance certificate for his consulting firm to show that the City holds more than double the general liability requested, and that they have also procured \$2M in cyber security and media coverage. This sets a precedent and he hopes that other public entities in Montana will require their vendors to maintain similar cyber security coverage for management consultants.

Mayor Collins asked for further comments; there were none.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the City Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m.

MAYOR

ATTEST:

CLERK OF THE COMMISSION