



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
January 9, 2018**



City of Helena

City Members Representative

- Betsy Miller
- Eric Sivers
- Jeff Shirley
- Dan Wirak
- Karen Reese

City of Helena Staff Representatives

- Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager
- Greta Dige, Code Enforcement
- Jennifer Schade, Recorder

City-County Parks Board Representative

- Dave Payne

Helena Citizens Council Representative

- Denise Roth Barber

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Jennifer Davis

PPLT Representative

- Evan Kulsea

LOCATION: City of Helena Parks and Recreation – Room 326

TIME: 5:30 Pm – 7:00 pm

Call to Order

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors

Gus Byrum, Nick Sovner, Amy Teegarden

Minutes Approval – December 12, 2017

- Jennifer needs to change the name “Nate” to “Evan” throughout the December minutes. Nate was not in attendance.
- With noted corrections listed above, Eric moved to approve the December 12th minutes. All agreed. Motion carried.
- Before moving on in the meeting, Dan asked about purchasing more counters. Brad stated that it is his goal for the next budget cycle to purchase more counters – hopefully sooner. There was a lot of value in this exercise.

HOLMAC Action Items

Review of 2018 Open Lands Work Plan and Comments

- Jennifer organized the comments by subject. On page 14, Brad broke down the comments by location, and indicated how many people were for the recommended change and how many were against the change.
- Rather than address all the comments of those who favored the project(s), Brad decided to pull key points of those who may be in favor with some corrections and those who were not in favor and their reasons.

Beattie Street Trailhead Parking Area

- Respondents overwhelmingly favored implementation of this project.

- One of the comments was to make certain we have a solution that suits the neighbors' concerns. Brad feels we are getting there. There was progress made at the community meeting last week. Our goal is to meet the public needs as well as those living adjacent to the trail.
- There was mention of the need for sidewalks in the area. The city doesn't build sidewalks. That is the responsibility of the property owner. Amy added that a couple of the new homes built in the area received sidewalk variances from the commission a few years ago. The lots adjacent to Beattie are privately owned lots and it would be the responsibility of those lot owners to build the sidewalks.
- Someone mentioned that Mount Ascension was intended as open space not a recreational park. Brad has very extensive files from the beginning of the bond. It was made very clear in the evaluation criteria that we had to provide trail connectivity and trail corridors.
- Traffic calming was covered Ryan Leland, City Engineering at the community meeting. Ryan stated the current traffic load on Beattie does not meet the requirements for the city commission to come in and provide funding for traffic calming from the city budget. This is a very important point for everyone to understand.
- Another comment stated that the park department needs to provide documentation received that there was a public request for the Beattie Street project. This is not the way the parks department does business. When managing our park properties we are pro-active managers of our property. We don't wait for requests from the public. We operate as land managers whether it is a developed park or in this case, open space. Per Amy, this is tied to management plan that did see public comment.
- Another comment was that we should show exploration into developing other trailhead sites. Brad stated that also included in the packet is a list of Helena Open Lands Trailhead Usage survey data. Brad said it is interesting that we seem to be getting even distribution on our trailheads. Mount Helena City Park is at 51% of the use and Mount Ascension City Park is at 49% of the use. Davis Street is already getting a large percentage of the use as is Beattie. We didn't just jump into this project. We have looked at other sites and we have been working on other trailheads improvements before we began to look at Beattie.
- To clarify, this is self-reported data – not the data from the counters. Brad feels this data has more value in comparison to the 2004 study. We are starting to get better distribution as we improve those sites.
- In time, with actual counters at Arrowroot, we should get better data than what we currently have.
- Dave – regarding the solution of the Beattie Street Trailhead, Dave understands that there will be another meeting with the neighborhood. He then asked Brad what items he is looking at in regards to the trails and the comments given. What criteria are you looking at?
- Brad stated he is looking to two different sources for direction – one is the trail committee headed by PPLT and the other is the comments that were submitted to the work plan.
- Brad – we haven't implemented the "wish list" from either the trails committee or from comments submitted. Sometimes we need to iron out these issues first or go out and walk the trails. There hasn't been as much new trail construction as one might think. We did a major trail last year, but most of the work has been small connective trails.
- Dave stated that at the community meeting there seemed to be implication that the Montana Bicycle Guild is pressing the issue of directional trails. We as a committee need to make it very clear at the next neighborhood meeting that these recommendations come from a series of different places, not just one group.

- Nick Sovner asked to speak in regards to key points under #1.
 - He agrees with the first bullet point.
 - Would there be asphalt up to the city park? Brad stated not at this point. This has been discussed in the past, but there are no concrete plans. Amy then stated that she heard two different questions: 1) Is the city planning upgrades to Beattie Street or 2) A future road that leaves Beattie Street Parking lot to the trail be paved? Per Amy, sidewalks would still not be required. Brad added that the areas that would have hard surfaces would include our handicapped parking areas and our van unloading spaces adjacent to the restroom as well as the area where we have access to the kiosk and picnic area.
 - Regarding traffic calming – it is Nick’s hope that this is not a done issue. At the community meeting, Eric asked Ryan Leland if the neighbors could request a traffic study be done. Ryan stated yes. The following day Ryan told Amy that a traffic study will be done in summer 2018 and parks will participate financially in that study.
 - The comment period has been extended to the end of January. There were 37 comments submitted, 2 from the Beattie Street area.
 - Greta will talk with Sarah to see if the public can review individual comments.

Directional Trail Project

- The second most commented-on topic was the directional trails. The comments were overwhelmingly for this. There were two points Brad wanted to discuss.
- The first comment dealt with using the existing jeep trail as a “loop route” for the directional trail. Rather than coming from the bridge and putting in a short trail connecting into Eddie McClure west, we could actually encourage usage of Jeep Trail as your go-back route as if you were going to do the course again. This person’s point is that this would actually cut traffic down that would be on Eddy West. Brad agreed with this recommendation. We will leave Jeep Trail in its existing route and do some work on it.
- The second comment was to develop permanent parking on the eastside of Mount Ascension prior to implementing the directional trail project. Brad stated this is a big decision and he would like HOLMAC to do some homework on this topic this summer. Brad feels we should go ahead with the directional trail but understands that we need to deal with parking issues. Brad thinks we should stay with our current parking area at the top of Mount Ascension. It would be very economical to widen out the parking area that is already there. It also encourages access from two different points. It helps facilitate other usage.

Entertainment Alternate

- The third topic was regarding the Entertainment Alternate.
- There was comment that work on the Entertainment Alternate route would impact a “beloved” section of the trail. This is proposed as part of our contract with PPLT this year. Evan and Brad have some time before finalizing the contract with PPLT.
- The alternate proposal was widening the trail, some tree removal, and shore up some of the area.
- Part of this request included the closure of the Jeep Trail. Rather than closing this, we are recommending that PPLT install better drainage. Brad feels that even if we reroute this trail, we would not get true closure. Brad prefers Evans idea of dealing with the drainage problems. Eric agreed and added that people do use this trail. Brad saw more hikers use the trail than those on bikes. Brad does not see the need to relocate this trail.

Old Shooting Rang Vault Toilet

- The forth topic deals with the Old Shooting Range Vault Toilet. There was a requested for a vault toilet and garbage receptacle/mutt mitt station be installed at this trailhead. In last year's work plan, we did have the garbage receptacle and mutt mitt installed. This met that need. In the spirit of the increased usage, Brad feels the vault toilet should be installed. This is something we can discuss this summer. Maybe we can do this as a cooperative project with the forest service. This trail will probably get more popular. We have plenty of room to put a toilet in there. Based on our history at this trailhead, a portable toilet would not do well in this area. Concrete ones are more robust. Because the trail isn't near neighborhoods, it is more apt to be vandalized.
- Eric stated this is a great trail for events. Brad said we should work on this area as a group this summer. It is getting winter recreation use now. Brad wants to make certain it is not getting underused because of any amenities.

Trail Signage

- Trail Signage is the next topic to address. There was a request for updated trail signage. Included in the packet is signage used in the Whitefish area. This is more in-depth signage than what we have.
- This is another assignment we need to work on this summer. We are working on a very comprehensive inventory of our current signage. We will include a condition inspection report as part of the inventory. If we do at some point want to do signage, we need to make that decision sooner than later. What will ultimately happen is that we will add more of what we currently have and then will need to replace all of them at some point. Brad would like HOLMAC to look at what we currently have and determine if it satisfies our needs.
- Eric stated navigation is really the issue and should be included on our signage for all the system trails. Greta added that color signage may be beneficial. Brad wants us to put some effort into this. We could place signage at major junctions with an additional trail map. Eric isn't opposed to this idea with matching signs on the ground. We should consider some criteria on the symbology on the map.
- Brad encouraged members to take pictures of signage that we may want to assimilate on our trails. We should try to stay consistent with signage the forest service uses.

Davis Street Expansion

- The last topic to address was a comment made regarding the Davis Street Expansion. A request came from an adjacent landowner more to learn more information about the city parks plans with regards to the Lower Davis expansion. Brad stated he will meet with this landowner to answer questions.
- Brad reiterated to the group that because we didn't have a final proposal put together for Beattie, we have agreed to extend the comment period to end of January and will then provide recommendations in February.
- Rock climbing comments: This is something Brad feels we need to add to the plan. When we approved the installation of the mountain climbing routes, we knew we would need to install some trails to the bottom of the rocks. Brad has offered to put this in this year. Brad Maddock asked this to be added to work plan.

Parks and Recreation Report – Brad

Beattie Street Trailhead

- We received the engineering slope information today. Engineering will be working on putting the two concepts together – the one right off of South Beattie and the one about 600 feet further in. We hope to have something to present at the next community meeting.

Aftershock Bridge

- Brad was able to get the stringers set. It snowed all day. There were issues with the chippers as the ground was frozen. Three log stringers are in and pinned. They left the excavator at the site. All they need to do now is the decking. Everything is ready to go.

Burning Update

- We had access to summer seasonal employees during Christmas and had permits to do work, but due to the amount of snowfall, we were unable to utilize the seasonal employees.

Forestry Update

- Forestry projects are on hold.

Weeds – Greta

- Once we get a break in snow removal, Greta will begin the process of doing RFQ's (Request for Quotes) for weed contractors for this coming summer as well as next summer.
- Greta hasn't been able to do much with target areas due to the carryover from last year and weather related issues.
- We still have plenty of funds in our grant. Greta will be recruiting hard so it gets dispersed this next summer.
- Weeds are buried under snow.

Report from PPLT

- Evan has been working on a RTP Grant that could affect city lands. He is requesting funds for a seasonal trail worker that can help accomplish annual maintenance goals on forest service land and city land. They would focus on fall line trails that are mostly on city land.
- PPLT is trying to do more than annual sweeping out debris. They want to focus on building up structures.
- They will also be requesting funding for upgrades to the Lower Davis Bike Skills area. This too is on city lands. This project was approved by HOLMAC years ago, but because there was no funding, they have not started to work on the plan. If there are funds available, PPLT will have to go through the comment period and amend the current work plan. The concept is to fence the area off and develop it into a managed and professionally built and designed experience
- PPLT signed a contract today. They received money from Department of Commerce to update and create an interactive map. The idea is to create a digital map where visitors can create planned routes and have suggested routes. Hopefully this will go live next trail season. The hope is that there will be some of this money which will be used for updates.
- Brad suggested Evan walk HOLMAC through the obstacle course as one of the field trips this year.

Cultural Resources

- None.

Wildlife

- None.

Forestry

- None.

Public Comment

- Gus – when planning work in the in the South Hills, please consider the wildlife as you are working through planning. Some of these areas are heavily developed. Brad has seen the antelope herd on the Folf course at times.
- Brad thanked HOLMAC members who attended the public meeting.
- Nick stated he was unable to attend the public meeting regarding Beattie Trailhead, but based on comments he heard, some felt the meeting was adversarial.
- Brad attended the meeting and he felt it was very informational. People wanted clarification and they were able to get that. People may not have heard what they wanted to but it seemed like it was a very productive meeting. Dan agreed. The community did a great job presenting their side. Jennifer stated she expected more of an adversarial tone and it was much more positive.
- Karen thought traffic discussion was very helpful. She learned a lot about the traffic calming. The city representatives answered questions.
- Years ago, someone from the neighborhood petitioned city do a traffic calming study. The city did this. The findings did not meet the necessary standards to move forward. However, the city went back to the petitioner and recommended the neighbors request a SID (Special Improvement District). The SID serves two primary functions: 1. the first is the creation of some form of infrastructure, and 2. the second is for the maintenance of some facility or service the City provides, such as street lighting. The costs of a SID are distributed across the properties benefiting from the new infrastructure or maintenance (the district). State law allows the distribution to be done on the basis of the area of each parcel in the district, the assessed value of each parcel, number of parcels, front footage of each parcel bordering a street, or a combination of these methods. The city never heard back from the petitioner. The city was scheduled to do another traffic study.
- The trips, speed issues, or accidents over a 3-year period did not meet city requirements.
- Per Brad – when the discussion moved to traffic, Ryan was able to clarify some things.

Other

- Please remember to send agenda items to Brad.

Next Meeting Date: May 9, 2017

Future Agenda Items:

- Review of the 2018 Open Lands Budget

Adjournment:

With no further business, the Helena Open Lands Management Advisory Coalition meeting adjourned at 7:12 pm.

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