



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
March 12, 2019**



City of Helena

GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Jeff Shirley
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes

CITY OF HELENA STAFF REPRESENTATIVES:

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

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD REPRESENTATIVE:

- Ross Johnson

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:

- Denise Roth Barber

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS:

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Evan Kulesa

LOCATION: City-County Building, Room 326

TIME: 5:30 Pm – 7:00 pm

Call to Order

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors

- Nick Sovner
- Barry Hood

Minutes Approval – February 12, 2019

- With no noted corrections, Eric moved to approve the February 12, 2019 minutes as presented. Karen seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

New Business

New Member Introduction – Brian Barnes

- Brian Barnes, newest member to this board, introduced himself.

HOLMAC's Representation on HOLTAC

- Betsy stated she plans on attending as many of the HOLTAC meetings as possible; however, she did recommend that we have backup in case she is unable to attend. Karen stated she would be willing to serve as backup should Betsy be unable to attend. Ross volunteered to serve as backup as well.
- The consultant will make the determination of when and where the meetings will be held. Brad then handed out a copy of the RFP that we received. When the decision is made to enter into an agreement with the consultant, we will hand over the contact information to the consultant and the consultant will contact the committee members.

- Brad – again, we only received one proposal. Brad did reach out to another entity and has given them a deadline of March 26, 2019 to respond.
- Brad did send a cost analysis for the respondent to complete. The respondent is also currently working on the city growth policy. This company is from a small town in Washington.
- Brad stated our next step will be to review the open lands budget to finance this project.
- Denise then added that she too is willing to serve as an additional backup for Betsy.
- HOLMAC had previously discussed collectively coming up with what HOLMAC wants to say and/or represent. Eric stated this is why he wants a seasoned HOLMAC representative to backup Betsy. It will be good to know that HOLMAC has a presence at these meetings.

Update on RFP

- Brad reiterated that he reached out to an additional company in Colorado to submit a proposal.
- We reached out to six companies in Montana and there was no interest in submitting a proposal.
- Denise then asked if we know when a decision will be made. Brad said we have given the second company until the 26 of March to submit their proposal. Brad hopes we will have a decision by early April.

Preliminary Open Lands FY 2020 Budget

- Brad stated we are in the midst of budget season. Open Lands is a maintenance district so we are not included in the general fund. This has been beneficial over the years and has given us a lot of flexibility.
- There is a per-lot fee that every lot within the city limits pays. At approximately 2,200 impervious square feet, there is an impervious fee above the per-lot fee.
- The budget starts with a special assessment of \$370,000. We get some additional revenue (approximately \$9,000) from the Archery Range Lease and the Donaldson Barn Lease. We get some interest earnings from money we have in reserves and a couple other payments that take us to about \$9,000. This gives us a total revenue of \$379,000.
- We then start with everything open lands pays for. The way the city works is our department pays for any other city services the department uses. Those are called intra-city charges and internal charges. This total is \$150,000. This figure may increase or decrease from year to year. Brad included fixed charges in this total as well. This figure also includes the 75% of the salary of the individual who manages the trail system. This amount also includes the salary of the person who works directly with Brad. We don't have to pay all his salary. This is a split position between open lands and parks maintenance. This individual works with open lands approximately 90% of the time. He collects trash, cleans restrooms, polices the parking lots, fixes broken items, cleans up graffiti, etc. We were able to keep all trailheads open this winter. We are also charged assessments as we have properties within the lighting districts where we are paying fees. This is another large part of the \$150,000. This figure also includes our fleet maintenance (to include: fuel, parts, etc.). The \$150,000 also is used to pay for Brad's office space.
- Then we go into our purchased services - \$135,000. The largest purchased service at present is our forestry contracts. The grant money we receive must be spent on those projects associated with that particular grant. You have to have an invoice that you have paid to an entity to send in for reimbursement. We are at approximately \$80,000 this year. We have two big projects – Mount Helena and Mount Ascension. We have our Capital 360 project this summer as well. IT fees (to include computer system, phone system, etc.) also fall under purchased services. Anytime we hire a surveyor or purchase a "service", this is paid for from this account.

- At this point, we haven't even funded personnel. 75% of Brad's salary comes out of Open Lands Maintenance. The remaining 25% comes out of Watershed for the 10-mile properties for the work Brad is doing up there. This includes Brad and the salary of the 5 seasonal employees hired for 14 weeks during the summer. Brad is looking for seasonal employees. This figure not only includes salaries, but also taxes, workers compensation, health benefits, etc.
- Our budget is now in the red and we still haven't bought mutt mitts yet. This year Brad anticipates mutt mitts to cost around \$10,000. This amount includes fencing supplies, grass feed, parts, tools, etc.
- Brad explained that the nice thing about a maintenance district is that anything we don't spend this year can roll over to next year.
- Based on the information Brad provided, we will be down \$74,000. This means we will most likely have to dip into our reserves. We do get reimbursed from the 360 grant for the work we do on that grant. We don't have to cash-match on this grant so we do get some recovery.
- The Capital 360 grant was a grant we received from the Department of Agriculture for \$850,000. This is a 5-year project. In the agreement, we are agreeing to manage adjacent forest located on forest service property. As long as Brad has a crew engaged in those projects, we are reimbursed for 100% of the work. We are also reimbursed a rate for different pieces of equipment we use.
- The crew has to go through a full week of training and they all get clothing, boots, PPE, hardhats, etc.
- So in question as to why we don't open the rest of the plan, we just do not have the funding available. Brad is hoping the consultant will come in at \$30,000 - \$40,000. That amount will then need to be added to the \$74,000 deficit.
- Denise agreed with Brad and added we don't need to update the plan just to update it. Denise recently attended a meeting where people expressed concern that just the recreation portion of the plan will be updated. It's not to say that the rest of the plan would not ever be updated. That could happen within a few years. And Brad added maybe the next update will be an internal update.
- Brad stated our assessment needs to be increased. It may be time to look at the per-lot charge or the assessment for impervious and get the figure increased. We will eventually come down in purchased services when we have completed the first thinning in all of our forested areas.
- Brad reminded the board that when we expand, it's not just forestry, but also weeds, surveying, and whatever needs to be done on that new piece of property.
- We have reserves so we will be okay; however, we have to maintain a certain level of reserves for emergencies. We can't spend them down to nothing.
- Brad has a budget meeting on Thursday and it will be presented to the City Manager and the Commission.
- Greta added that in addition to the \$850,000 grant, they added an additional \$184,000 for weed treatment to be divide among 5 areas.
- Brad – this exercise brought up one important factor – in open lands we are very limited on our ability to generate revenue. Could there be recovery for mutt mitts. We may need to look at charging for events that take place on the trails. The city is also looking at putting an option to donate to trails/open lands on the water bills. The parks department reserves space for special events. It is difficult to charge for some of our trail events as our partners are many of the groups that also do work on the trail system.
- Brad encouraged everyone to invite friends to comment on the plan.
- **Brad will send out a copy of the proposal we received.**

- Ross asked Brad what the total of the reserves is. Brad stated he believes it is around \$300,000. Lot fees are set and are indefinite. Urban forestry does not have impervious space. Brad doesn't have any big capital item needs at this time.
- Brad was asked if there is a map that shows just the open land parcels. Our two major natural parks are Mount Ascension and Mount Helena are most of our acreage. We also have some inner-city parcels that we manage (Nob Hill, etc.). Per Greta – we handle more natural areas (Charles VanHook Wetlands, Chrystal Drive to Winscott, Oak Street to Beltview, etc. These parcels are not that fiscally taxing. Greta does some weed spraying, but the maintenance has been minimal.
- Eric then suggested perhaps we find an area for a campground. This has been discussed. HOLMAC came close to giving this serious consideration before we renewed the Archery Lease. Brad added there are other issues such as you can't have an open fire in city limits unless there is a fire pit. Many of our properties have deed restrictions.
- One other property that has been discussed is the piece of property off of Lime Kiln (Lodgepole and Lime Kiln). We have approximately 20 acres with no access. This is also deed restricted. Eric suggested we consider the property by the Old Shooting Range. A campground could deter the undesirable activity that occurs at that location. Brad stated this could be a good choice. Traffic on Davis Street has increased. Brooklyn Bridge trail will also increase the flow of traffic at that location. The forest service will be building this new trail.

Discussion of updating the rest of the Open Lands Management Plan

- Greta discussed the comment period for the Open Lands Management Plan. Comments can be made and/or viewed online. The link to post a comment or view a comment is as follows:
<http://www.helenamt.gov/home/news-item/article/public-comment-2019-helena-open-lands-work-plan-and-forum.html>
- You can also read the draft work plan.
- To date we have one comment submitted. Comments from email or in writing will also be added to the website so the public can view **all** comments submitted.
- The deadline to submit comments is by the next HOLMAC meeting (April 9, 2019).
- The following information has also been posted on our website:
The Helena Open Land Management Advisory Committee invites you to its Annual Public Forum Tuesday, April 09, 2019, 5:30 - 7:30 P.M., Room 326, City-County Building, 316 North Park Avenue, Helena.
- Greta posted the information on Facebook and Twitter. Posting to Twitter was difficult as there are limited amount of character space. Denise then told Greta that she can shorten the link by going to <https://bitly.com/> for assistance. This will help keep the characters down.
- Jennifer has also posted the Public Forum information in the Helena IR.

Reports from Subcommittees

Weeds – Greta

- Weeds are buried under snow.
- On March 6, 2019 Greta was asked to do a weed presentation at the Helena Hikes meeting.
- Greta anticipates lots of volunteer hours for weed pulling efforts.
- Denise suggested we do some type of training for the “dos” and “don'ts” of weed pulling. Greta stated she and Evan created a post for Facebook last year about this issue. This was mentioned at the Helena Hikes meeting as well.

- Denise asked what is the best time to begin to pull weeds? Greta stated as soon as you spot weed patches. Denise recommended we continually educate throughout the season.
- Brad stated that Mike is getting a lot of weeds in the garbage can. While this is good, seeds can drop along the way. It is best to bag at the area. The volunteer can leave the bag at the garbage container for pickup. Daisy Hill is a heavy weeded area.
- If you don't have a bag, don't pull. Greta prefers this approach.
- We do have an "Adopt A Trail Program". PPLT helps with this as well.
- Greta has also requested information regarding the PlayCleanGo Campaign. The link to this site is as follows: <https://www.playcleango.org/>.
- Denise added that the more information we provide, the more this will help.

Other

- Betsy – if comments for the work plan are due by April, will we finalize the plan in May? Brad stated it will depend on the responses from the public.
- Beattie Street has already been decided on. Will there be work on this? Brad is working on finding an engineer for the project. We may need to look for more grant support for the project. The only thing left in the current grant is the delivery and installation of the restroom.
- Once engineering has been done (cut and fill), they can provide us with a cost estimate. We are going out of house for the engineering. Once we engage in the project, it will go back to commission.
- **Regarding the April 9 Meeting: This meeting will be held in the normal meeting room – room 326.**
- Greta can make this invitation more clear on our Facebook page. This meeting is to discuss the **Draft 2019 Work Plan** only.
- **Jennifer will send out the list of compiled comments prior to the next meeting.**

Report from PPLT

- None.

Public Comment

Next Meeting Date: April 9, 2019

Future Agenda Items

Adjournment

With no further business, the March 12, 2019 HOLMAC meeting adjourned at 6:48 pm.

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