



HCC Full Board Meeting

## Minutes

Weds. February 28<sup>th</sup> 7-9PM

In person room 326 or via Zoom

**7:10PM Meeting Called to order by Chair Kuiper** – technical difficulties – the members on Zoom could not hear or see us in room 326 and we could not hear or see them. Zoom was stopped about 30 minutes into meeting.

**In Attendance** – Lori FitzGerald, John Andrew, Ben Kuiper, Sonda Gaub, Lowell Chandler, Bob Schlack, Sydney Ausen, Samuel Brown, Anna Kratz, Brenda Valerio, Dylan Klapmeier, Bob Habeck, Susan Steffens.

**HCC Members Excused:** Patricia Bik, Emily Mowers, Chase Eaton, Rick Boleware

**HCC members on Zoom** with little to no connection (they will not be counted as absent) Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry, Joe Lehman, Paige Reagan Myers, Sean Morrison, Janet Zimmerman, Ryan Schwochert, Denise Roth-Barber.

**Members of the public:** Sharon Haugen, Mary (Mickey) Harlow. Andy O'Brien (Dr. Walter O'Brien) & Chad Bastewell.

**Quorum established** - yes

**Approval of January 2023 Full HCC Board Minutes** – all members were in favor, no changes or additions. Minutes approved.

**Swear in New HCC member** Ben Kuiper asks HCC nominee Brenda Valerio to stand and raise her right hand. She repeats after Ben, the oath of office. She is now an official HCC Representative of District #6.

**Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items:** None

**City Commission Update** - none

**League of Women's Voters Spokespersons regarding Local Government Review** with Sharon Haugen and Mary Micky Harlow

There will be question on the June 2024 ballot, asking citizens if they would like a local government review to be conducted. This review will be conducted by a Commission of persons and could take approximately two years. The Montana Constitution requires that the people be

given the opportunity to vote on the question of reviewing their local government at least every ten years. This review is a matter of governance not politics.

Mary Harlow says the City of Helena has a charter, but the County does not. The charter is a bit like a constitution and includes a preamble. Montana has shared power.

What can a Local Government Study Commission do? It examines the governance structure and its power. It may also examine the delivery system.

What can the Local Government Review suggest? It could suggest that the existing form of government be amended, it could draft or change the charter, it could recommend consolidation of City and County government. These are just some ideas.

For example, in 1914 the public voted to extend the term of office of the mayor from 2-4 years. In 2001, the Citizen's Council's rules changed to fill vacancies.

What can local citizens consider for the LGR (Local Government Review)

Is there a better way to govern ourselves? Are local citizens well represented? Is government sufficiently fulfilling its duties? Should local government do more or less? How is local government working for you?

It is unique that Montana allows for a Local Government Review – most states do not provide this option.

Sharon Haugen Speaks- A June 2024 ballot will include the option for voters to vote if they would like to have a Local Government Review. If approved, this study could last 2 years. The League of Women Voters is available to speak to your organization. Please contact them at [lwv.helena@gmail.com](mailto:lwv.helena@gmail.com) if you would like to arrange a presentation.

Some questions you could ask yourselves for example would be:

Do you want to have more Commissioners? Information added to the Charter. A different form of government all together? 25 years ago, Lewis & Clark County drafted language to create a charter but citizens voted it down. The vast majority of time, citizens think the local government is functioning well.

You could also ask How the process of local government connects to its citizens?

Lowell Chandler asks how many municipalities in Montana have the Commission/Manager form of government? Sharon is not sure but will look into it. Most cities, especially the smaller ones have a Commission form of government. Missoula is unique in that their Mayor is their Chief Executive. Some areas have voted to consolidate, such as Anaconda/Deerlodge.

Mary Harlow adds that Fergus County recently adopted a charter. Helena, because of its charter, can pass resolutions to help its citizens, whereas Lewis & Clark County has to wait for the State Legislature to approve.

Sharon Haugen says most cities move from Chair Powers to Governing Powers.

Mary Harlow says Helena is very citizen oriented. The League of Woman Voters is happy to help with meetings and get more citizens involved.

Lowell Chandler asks how typical is it for larger cities in Montana to have "at large" areas vs. the Ward system. Sharon H. replies that most areas these days are "at large." She adds, a good resource about the Commission/Manager form of government would be the Local Government Center out of Bozeman.

Both Mary and Sharon welcome your involvement with the League of Women Voters. The League doesn't do partisan lobbying with the Legislature, it may look at citizen's rights, however. Mary reiterates that the Montana Legislature gives citizens the right of a lot of participation.

## **Officer Reports**

**17:56 Chair – Ben Kuiper** – Ben talks about HCC Districts having their own monthly meetings to be more accessible to their District Constituents. District #1 has been doing this for over a year, and now, District #2 will be having neighborhood outreach as well.

Ben K. wants to brainstorm about future recommendations. Often it is too late for the HCC to put forth recommendations as the Commission has already voted. Examples of this were with Ruth's Place and the Rodney Street Trees. Persons attending Commission meetings and hearing about issues coming down the pipeline quickly, need to tell the HCC asap.

**Lowell Chandler** says he has often been disappointed with the communication between the HCC and the Commission. It would be great if the both the City Manager and the Commission would contact the HCC about upcoming issues.

**Ben Kuiper** would like to see better standard operations in keeping the HCC informed.

Sydney Ausen asks if a select group of people can get together and work on a recommendation themselves? Chair Kuiper answers yes, and the HCC can always call a special meeting to get recommendations approved more quickly vs. waiting until our monthly meeting.

**Bob Habeck** – if too many recommendations are made, and if they are not thoughtfully crafted, they may be viewed as less credible. The HCC's recommendations need to be measured and prioritized. Often, we (the HCC) don't even know if funding exists to support our recommendations.

**Ben Kuiper** – Any member of the HCC can bring a recommendation forward to the body of the HCC, then it is up to the HCC to vote, discuss and approve it before it is sent on to the Commission.

**Bob Schlack** asks can HCC endorse contacting specific HCC members of HCC districts? And how does the public know who to contact? Peggy Benkelman (coordinator) explains that all that information is on the HCC website <https://www.helenamt.gov/Government/Helena-Citizens-Council> a person can enter their address, it then says what district they are in, then it leads the person to who their district representatives are. The HCC does endorse having District meetings. District #1 and District #2 have them.

**Vice Chair- Lowell Chandler** Guide in the writing of recommendations. Lowell explains the template for writing recommendations. He will continue to work on it, adding more detail. He hopes other HCC members will step forward and write recommendations. Lowell also mentions having an HCC Recommendation Flow Chart. It will state what we expect from the Commission in terms of receiving the HCC recommendation, response, response time etc. Most of the past HCC recommendations are on the HCC website here:

<https://www.helenamt.gov/Government/Helena-Citizens-Council/Current-Topics-and-Recommendations>

**HCC member** asks (not sure of who asked the question) If a member of the public makes a complaint to the Commission at a Commission meeting, does the Commission refer the matter back to the HCC? **Ben Kuiper** says typically that doesn't happen.

**Secretary – Diana Hammer** – excused so no report.

**Treasurer – Lori FitzGerald** – Lori introduces herself. She discusses the formation of the Budget Committee. She would like to have at least 5-6 HCC members on it.

**HCC members who have stepped up to be a part of the Budget Committee:**

John Andrew – Community Development & Transportation (NMATC)

Lowell Chandler – NMTAC & Transportation

Sonda Gaub

Dylan Klapmeier

Sydney Ausen – Citizen Conservation Board

Samuel Brown – Parks Board

Diana Hammer – Water Quality Protection  
Denise R. Barber – Solid Waste Master Planning  
Public Art – Paige Reagan Myers

HCC Budget Committee Members may also want to follow specific City Department Budget presentations that will occur in April and May, or you could listen to them on City's YouTube Channel. Budget Committee members will then write several paragraphs to be included in the entire HCC Budget Recommendation.

Lori FitzGerald asks if there are any budget/issues anyone would like addressed? An HCC member (don't know who this is) answers: He would like to see better nighttime lighting at basketball courts.

Details about Budget Process with dates – this timeline was emailed to all HCC members. The HCC coordinator can send it out again. The HCC's final budget recommendation for year 2025 will be due to the Finance Department and the City Manager before June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

Bob Habeck reminds HCC members that making a Budget Recommendation regarding the City's budget is one of the HCC's main priorities as stated in the Charter.

HCC Members, please remember to sign up to attend Commission meetings and send your notes to the coordinator soon after so she can post them to the agenda.

Lori FitzGerald reminds members to view the HCC proposed budget FY 2025. She says there are not too many adjustments that can be made. Many of the costs are fixed. Adjustments can be made in the highlighted areas. Peggy Benkelman shows the example of the telephone charge.

### **New Business**

Approve HCC Budget FY 2025 – all HCC members were given a copy of the budget several days before the meeting. Chair Ben Kuiper calls for a motion. Lowell Chandler motions to approve the budget and Anna Kratz seconds. Chair Kuiper opens the floor for any further discussion, none was had. Chair Kuiper calls for a verbal vote the quorum of 13 HCC members were all in favor.

**51:50 Motion passes** – budget is approved.

**Future Recommendations** - HCC Member Sonda Gaub mentions the issue with snowplowing – shaded sides of streets turn into "ice rinks". Several HCC members mention phoning the City Transportation Department and they were very helpful in resolving issues.

Bob Habeck – says maybe this is more of a fact-finding mission vs. an actual recommendation. Knowing who and when to contact city departments is important.

Lowell Chandler suggests having links to city departments posted on our website that are seasonal concerns such as snowplow requirements.

### **8:25 PM Commission Attendees' Reports –**

**2/7 Pat Bik** - Fire and Police presented public safety proposal, which includes \$1.4m for 9 new police officers; \$1.6m for 15 new firefighters; and \$6.9m for the new fire station #3. The voters will need to decide in favor of the mill levy and bond for construction in order for the proposal to be realized.

The City share of Infrastructure funding is \$458,775, which must be matched locally. The Commissioners ranked their choices among three proposals, which resulted in no conclusive winners. The matter will be further discussed at subsequent meetings. Commission discussed formation of a Housing Task Force to deal with homelessness in Helena. Also, the Commission looked at the costs involved in Local Government Review, should the votes decide in June 24 to conduct such a study.

## **2/12 Nancy Perry**

A total of \$3,834,615.88 was owed on claims from January 1 through January 26. The Commission approved all claims. An **audit of city finances** was conducted FY2023, with “no findings”, indicating that the auditors found no significant issues with all financial statements and the city’s Finance Department is complying with all OMB guidelines.

Renee McMahon, Human Resources Director, announced that all city **employee union contracts** were signed and finalized except the contract with the police union.

Montana’s constitution decrees that every 10 years each municipality decides if it wants to have a **local government review**. This decision is made by election and would be conducted by the County Election Department. This election would be held in June 2024 and would be paid from cash reserves in the 2025 budget. A 5-person review committee would be compiled to educate the public.

The commission discussed distributing Downtown Urban Renewal District (DURD) TIF funds for **facade improvements at the Helena YWCA**. The commission unanimously approved using TIF funds for the YWCA window project.

The commission unanimously approved the final plat for commercial phase 5 of **Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows** Major Subdivision creating 7 city lots containing 6.56-acres from Tract 1-A-1.

The commission unanimously approved updating current code “the **Use of Public Rights of Way, Title 7 - Chapter 13**” to reflect the current code updates of **internet and telecommunications software** in regard to technical advancements.

The commission unanimously approved granting a change in the use permit to allow **enlarging the Lucky Lil’s Casino** into the space previously occupied by the convenience store at 115 Enterprise.

**2/21 Nancy Perry** – approval of District #6 Rep Brenda Valerio – moved to final vote on 2/26. . A new online mapping tool will be available from the Community Development webpage.

In 2016 and 2018 the City of **Helena annexed wholly surrounded properties on the westside of Helena**. The City Commission and Lewis and Clark County funded the installation of water and sewer mains to properties in the annexed areas with 20-year loans at 0% interest. **A time limit was imposed on connecting to the new water/sewer mains**. The project was delayed and the **installation time limits and available loans expired**. This presentation discusses the revised conditions for repayment and the source of funds.

Staff recommended the following prioritized list from the State-Funded SLIPA program:

1) Bioreactor Mixer Replacement 2) ADA ramp replacement 3) Fire Suppression System at Fire Station No. 2 -The fire chief got on the Zoom call and stated that the fire suppression system did not belong in this project. The choice of projects will be discussed publicly and voted on at a Monday Commission meeting.

Construction of the East Side Arterial Connector, to complete the east side of South Helena interchange, connecting I-15 to US 12 on the east side of Helena, was initially proposed in 2002. During the economic downturn of 2008, a lack of funding brought the project to a halt. Recent development in the adjacent Mountain View Meadows subdivision and other factors have sparked renewed interest in the completion of an east side arterial. The City asked the Commission for a letter of support for the project.

In collaboration with the City, Lewis & Clark County intends to use ARPA funds to improve access to the fairgrounds and design a roundabout at Custer and Henderson. Work is scheduled to begin this summer and end next summer. The County will provide material and costs; the City will provide manpower and time.

**Department Reports 2/21** - The City is designated as recipient of a restricted donation \$80,113.24 from the estate of the late William Greiner. The Commission is accepting recommendations on how to expend the funds according to the wishes of Mr. Greiner. The Commission discussed the suggested fees for use of the golf course. They will be adopted at a meeting in March. The Commission discussed the suggested fees for use of the swimming pool. The swim season will be 10 weeks this summer. The pool costs more to run than it takes in.

**2/26 Ben Kuiper** – verbal report – The Public Safety Mill Levy (for Police and Fire) will go on the ballot. Since the outcome is by the citizen voters, City employees cannot use city services or advocate for or against a ballot issue. HCC members also cannot use City services, they can however advocate for or against on a personal level. There was also a resolution discussed to raise the Golf Course and Pool Fees at this meeting.

## **Coordinator Report** – Peggy Benkelman

Commission Meeting Attendance Sign Up – Anna Kratz signs up for April 18<sup>th</sup> and Lori FitzGerald signs up for April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Peggy apologizes for the technical difficulties – she explains that she hasn't used this room for a meeting since November 2023, and was not aware of the new app requirements for audio and visual use. She will research and get the required training. Peggy again states she cannot use city services to advocate for or against a ballot measure. She can however provide educational materials.

**Outreach Committee Report** – Emily Mowers – Emily is absent, so Peggy Benkelman gives short report. She says there will be a new brochure printed this year (2024) and also a water bill insert for the entirety of Helena stating, “Engage with Us”.

**Several HCC members volunteer to attend these advisory boards/committees and give written updates – see below.**

**City-County Consolidated Planning Board** – John Andrew

**Helena Public Arts Committee** – Paige R. Myers

**Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council** – Lowell Chandler

**L&C County Water Quality Protection District** - Diana Hammer

**Citizen Conservation Board** – Sydney Ausen

**Solid Waste Master Plan Meetings** – Denise R. Barber

**City-County Library Board** – Anna Kratz

**Golf Advisory Board** – Bob Schlack

**City-County Consolidated Parks Board – Samuel Brown with Pat Bik's report:** - The Board supported the proposal by American Legion Baseball League to place artificial turf from first and third baselines out to the foul area to save on maintenance costs. Purchase and installation paid for by the League; no City funds needed. Also, BID proposed installation of modular, ADA compliant, public restroom in Constitution Park. Board supported with funding secured at \$98,000 from City, \$35,000 County; \$44,000 BID, and an unsecured at \$63,000 from Downtown TIF.

**Affordable Housing Trust Fund- Brenda Valerio with Pat Bik's report – 2/21/2024** - The first project to be awarded a \$400,000 “permanent loan” from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, returned to the Advisory Board to request an additional \$400,000. Seth and Tyson O'Connell, the developers of Twin Creek Apts, to be built at corner of Alice and Janet Streets (south of car dealerships), increased the units of low and moderate income housing from 40 to 72 units. The Advisory Board voted to recommend the City Commission support the request, which would leave the Trust Fund with only \$200,000 remaining. The Trust Fund began with \$100,000 of city general fund, and is increased by donations, repayments on loans, sale of city-owned land, and 10% of urban renewal TIF.

**MPO** – looking for HCC member to attend

**1:14:25 Chair Ben Kuiper calls for a motion to adjourn.** Motion made by Sonda Gaub and seconded by Anna Kratz

**Meeting Adjourned**