



HCC Full Board Meeting

Minutes

Weds. July 24th, 7-9PM

In person room 326 or via Zoom

7:35 Meeting Called to order by Chair Ben Kuiper

In Attendance –Lori FitzGerald, John Andrew, Diana Hammer, Nancy Perry, Joe Lehman, Ben Kuiper, Sonda Gaub, Paige Myers, Sean Morrision, Chase Eaton, Bob Schlack, Rick Boleware, Anna Kratz, Denise Roth Barber, Susan Steffens, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

HCC Members Excused: Patricia Bik, Emily Mowers, Janet Zimmerman, Ryan Schwochert, Brenda Valerio, Sydney Ausen, Dylan Klapmeier, Bob Habeck

Members of the public: Dr. Gregory Thomas

Quorum established - yes

Approval of June 2023 Full HCC Board Minutes –

All members were in favor, no changes or additions.

8:32 Motion to approve made by Chase Eaton, seconded by Paige Myers.

8:34 Minutes approved.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items:

8:48 Kevin League speaks about Dust Abatement on Davis St.

Issue: Road dust is negatively impacting the safety and health of the recreating public.

Proposed solution: Regular dust abatement application on Davis Gulch Road from the end of the pavement to the end of the road (about 1.5 miles)

Kevin League shows map of trails, parking areas, trailheads etc.

Kevin League presents slides with explanations:

- Davis Gulch roads. It's 2 trail heads are the primary access to the Mount Ascension and Rodney Ridge trail systems
- They're the second most popular access point to Helena's renowned trail system, second only to the Mount Helena Trailhead, and this is data provided by the city of Helena has encouraged the public to recreate along Davis Gulch Road with a commendable amount of new recreational investments along its route.
- Davis Gulch Road is a popular recreational access to a variety of recreational amenities that parallel the road, and these include a recently renovated Deford and Old Shooting Range trailheads. These renovations include new kiosks, signing, fencing vault toilets, ADA accessible concrete parking lot pad and a wheelchair charging station at the old shooting range trailhead.

- There's also an outdoor archery range that is leased to an Archery Club, and is used a lot, especially this time of year, as we get ready for archery season, which is right around the corner. There are also 2 recently renovated bike skills parks. These are commonly referred to as the upper and Lower Davis bike skills parks. And finally, there is a brand-new one-half mile long universal access trail that parallels the Upper Davis bike Skills Park from the old shooting range trailhead. All of the trailheads access our wonderful South Hills trail network which continues to grow and expand and achieves national recognition which drives a lot of tourism and new growth to our city
- Additionally, this is a large investment by the city for the new Universal Access Trail. If you haven't had a chance to experience it, I certainly encourage you to. It's not for bikes. It's for pedestrians and for folks that that have accessibility/disabilities and need to use a wheelchair. It's very level and it's a nice place for a walk. However, it is immediately adjacent to Davis Gulch Road, and is heavily impacted by road dust.
- This data is from Montana Department of transportation: from 2,012 to 2,020 traffic levels on Davis Road were steady at approximately 550 vehicles.
- Recently the traffic level increased. Going from 550 to 845 vehicles per day and that is not due to new housing, (according to Montana Cadastral) but due to more recreational use.
- The high amount of traffic and its steep topography on either side of the road tends to be dense, and dust gets trapped along the road directly impacting the safety and health for recreationalists and downstream residences as well.

Peggy Benkelman will send the YouTube link of the drone flight to everyone on the HCC as the link would not open within the Mersive app.

- Between May and September of 2017 there were 11,142 trail users who recreated from the Davis Gulch Road trailhead, or nearly 18% of all trail users on the South Hills Trail System, second only to Mount Helena.
- In popularity the authors of the studies highlighted the significance of these findings in attracting businesses and employers to our community. In short, people love the trails and have moved to Helena because of them. Visitors who use the trail system spent about 4 million dollars between May and September. This supports 60 jobs annually and \$1.5 million in income and \$185,000 in local tax revenue.
- Davis Gulf Road has become a significant entry point into the trail system, and it's especially popular with all trail users, including tourists and visitors who want to enjoy the natural beauty of our city. However, the unsightly, unhealthy, and dangerous clouds of dust, obscuring the scenery tarnishes the overall appeal of the area, in my opinion, and this could potentially deter tourists from visiting, resulting in negative impact to local businesses and revenue.
- We need the full length of the road to be treated so that the folks that are using that recreational infrastructure do not have to deal with the dust. I strongly encourage the Helena Citizens Council to recommend to the city routine dust, abatement for the full length of Davis Gulch Road.
- I also want to point out that Helena has a bad rap for air quality, and a lot of that has to do with wildfire smoke and a lot of that feels like that's out of our control.
- But this is a problem that we can control. I think it is a simple solution to a rather aggressive problem.

23:47 Bob Schlack asks if the city can use a large water truck on the road to help with dust. Kevin League answers if there is a full mile of road left untreated, it can get very dusty.

Denise Roth Barber asks why the city stopped treating the road 2X per year, if that was sufficient? Kevin League says yes it was sufficient, but he does not know why they stopped the applications.

29:17 HCC member John Andrew thinks there should be feedback from the Transportation Department and that an HCC Recommendation is in order.

29:53 Lori FitzGerald District #1 feels a specific speed limit should be incorporated into the HCC Recommendation.

30:32 Sonda Gaub District #2 agrees with the speed limit idea.

33:36 Bob Schlack wonders if there will be an increase in traffic on Davis in the future? Kevin League responds we can't predict that, and MDT doesn't always keep its stats current.

Diana Hammer gives a quick update on how the recommendation got its start.

37:01 Denise Roth Barber states we should include the wording, "we would like the city to have regular applications of dust abatement materials"

39:15 Susan Steffens adds we should state actual time frames for applications.

Road must be graded before dust abatement can be applied, or it just washes off.

41:45 Kevin League says the city could just spray water too.

45:16 Paige Myers suggests changing the wording from average daily to average daily vehicles.

45:46 Paige Myers wants to amend the document to read: the HCC recommends that the city reinstate its past practice of dust abatement with magnesium chloride or similar and add once or twice per year on South Davis/South Davis Gulch Road.

4:08 Anna Kratz seconds the amendment

46:37 Chair Kuiper calls for a vote. All were in favor, non-opposed to the new amendment.

47:51 Diana Hammer wants to add another amendment: The HCC recommends that the speed limit be lowered to its historic 15MPH for the length of the road.

If paving the road occurred, people would just drive faster.

48:35 Lori FitzGerald thinks we should add along with the speed limit: appropriate signage.

50:03 Chair Kuiper calls for a vote on the amendment. All were in favor. Amendment passes.

53:06 Denise Roth Barber and Paige Myers suggest wording such as “ with appropriate signage, such as driver feedback”

53:06 This amendment is seconded by Lori FitzGerald.

55:41 Friendly discussion results in wording of “appropriate notification such as driver feedback signage”

55:48 Chair Kuiper calls for a vote on the amendment. All were in favor, amendment passes

56:32 Call for vote on entire recommendation as amended. No public comment. A roll call vote is taken. 15 in favor, non-opposed. Recommendation passes.

Officer Reports

Chair – Ben Kuiper – Chair Kuiper suggests that if there is time at the end of meetings, he will allow for district reports.

Vice Chair – Sonda Gaub – nothing new to report. She is still working on a new hires recommendation for the 3rd Fire Station.

Secretary – Diana Hammer – Wanted to bring up the new Land Use Planning act and the HCC’s possible involvement with the Planning Department and gathering citizen input. We should have time on the next agenda to address districts to plan on this.

Treasurer – Lori FitzGerald – The HCC’s 2025 budget is about \$100 less than last year. There are two new expenses for 2025: \$20 for candy for Farmers Market, as well as \$20 fee to attend the Artwalk.

New Business

Update on a yearly HCC calendar – Diana Hammer speaks about the calendar. It is very general and gives members ideas about upcoming events to plan for. Peggy Benkelman brings calendar onto the Zoom screen. Suggestions are made and calendar is updated.

Commission Attendees’ Reports –

7/10 Sonda Gaub - Discussions around the

Feaver Trail annexation and the potential to connect the trail.

Local ordinances for overnight camping and the city attorney will have an update at the July 15 meeting.

Report on the 10 mile creek fire was caused by a transformer.

In the works are the design and financing for the third fire station and no time frame has been implemented.

A Bond is being suggested for the staffing of the third Fire Station.

1. Presentations

- The public hearing date was set for August 12 for the resolution No. 11093. The planning Division of the Community Development Department is updating the fees. There will be a roll out of the fees to buffer the cost jump from 1997 fees. There was discussion of fee waivers and reductions for affordable housing and how it could be regulated
- Transportation System presented the 1st of the Capitol Traffic plan. The plan includes a one way circle pattern going clock wise from 6th(east bound traffic), Roberts (south bound), Lockley (west bound). This would accommodate angled parking with a bike lane. There was public comment from the down town business groups that a counter clock wise would favor visitors to visit downtown. A citizen commented that angle parking was a concern for biker safety.
- Transportation System continued discussion on the Benton Turn lanes and present some projected costs. This will be voted on July 29th.

2. Department Reports

- The Fire Tower Rehabilitation is seeking a rebid.
- McHugh Recycling Bin removal plan will be a 30 day transition for residents with public signs.

- Dissolving NMTAC Board discussion and Two board members from NMTAC want to continue.
- 1st Presentation of the first draft of the Electronic Meeting Policies. The policy addressed all public meeting to be officially recorded with a time stamping, accountability of commissioners of in-person meetings. Addressing technical difficulties and procedures is also included in the policy. It was reported that the staff are in favor of the policies. There was considerable amount of discussion around Section 9 that outlines the expectation of attendance of the commission. Through the discussion the section will have a revision. The second presentation will be on July 29th.
- A title clean up on the Property near the Armory for at Quitclaiming. The final owner will be Saint Peters Hospital.

7/15 Nancy Perry – Flora Wong Day was proclaimed. A third bid by Helena Sand and Gravel was rejected by the commission for the turn lane on Benton Ave. Helena has established a sister city in **Stepanavan, Armenia**. Lights are out and cannot be repaired at the mini -malfunton junction. The solution has been all way stop signs and the public is happy with that. Helena has agreed to be an AARP network of age-friendly communities. There has been an update on sign codes regarding placement, size and brightness. The Firing Range at the Airport will raise prices for the general public. It will cost \$100 for a half day to shoot. Zoning and Building fees will be raised.

7/24 Ben Kuiper – Katie Ryan (applicant for District #5) will preliminarily be confirmed. Big Sky Rail Authority gave a presentation by Dr. Gregory Thomas. He again confirmed that the train will NOT increase citizen taxes. The Authority asked that Helena give a sign-on contribution of \$4500. There were assessment overviews – there will be an increase of \$2 for the solid waste assessment.

1:19:18 Diana Hammer would like to re-iterate to the Commission, that the HCC's Waste Recommendation does not want an increase in rates.

1:20:02 Denise R. Barber would like to ask the city to encourage the county to sign on to the Big Sky Rail Authority.

Public member Dr. Gregory Thomas replies. He has done a presentation to the city and county about the train.

- Apparently, the county was largely spooked off because there was some confusion in that a member of the public was providing them with incorrect information that convinced them that there was going to be some local tax liability if they supported passenger rail. So that is why we have not been able to get the county on board yet. What is going on as far as what I presented this evening to the City Commission is, we have a new municipal partner program, and that program was created in part to allow cities such as Helena to be able to signify their support for the passenger rail returning.. There really isn't an MOU. It's a very informal situation, because it creates no liability on the city's part it. It's basically what they're going to find out when they talk to Billings. It's basically the mayor issuing a letter saying, yes, we'd like to join your municipal partner program. And the reason that we ask for the contributions is because right now, at this point, Big Sky Passenger Rail, doesn't have any budget funding that comes from the State or any other entity.
- So, it's largely volunteer effort.
- The effort of Dave Strolleyer and Dan Bucks is what has gotten us to this point, where we are being able to do so much in 3 and a half years that would normally take over 25 years in other communities around the country that have fought to have their passenger rail restored. The contribution which is minimal for the city of Helena is \$4,500 a year if they choose to give it. Lewis and Clark County did not come up with a formal resolution. Yet they have contributed \$20,000 to Big Sky Passenger rail, which is much more than some of the counties who have issued formal resolutions.

Paige Myers asks: So, this is a Federal program going through multiple States' railroads? And there's a separate project for a Montana only railroad or is that dropped?

- **Dr. Gregory Thomas responds:** No, there, there is no separate project. This is about revival of a long-distance route runs from Chicago to Seattle. There's a 750

mile stretch of that long distance route that runs through southwestern Montana. This entire route out of 16 routes was submitted for restoration in 2023 to the Federal Rail Administration. This was the only long-distance route that they decided to green light. They have, given us a grant for half 1 million dollars to do the feasibility study to have the engineers help us see how much it's going to cost for us to get the route back up and running. Literally all the money is going to the consultants who are going to help us write the feasibility study.

Diana Hammer - This is the reinstatement of the Southern Amtrak line that used to go through Montana. It's called the North Coast Hiawatha Route. The Amtrak system is all federally funded. Thoughts were that there was a tax implication - there never was. It was a misunderstanding on the part of the Commission.

- **Chair Ben Kuiper** - I think this would be an item that we could write a recommendation on. This is clearly about future development of the city and if we wanted to encourage the city to become a partner municipality with this organization or encourage them to communicate with the county. I think that would be completely within our scope.
- **Diana Hammer** -it's not a requirement that the city or the county approve it, but it just would look really silly in my mind that if there's going to be a Southern Amtrak line(called the North Coast Hiawatha Line), why shouldn't it go through the capital city. And why wouldn't the city and the county support that? Because there's no downside, there's a lot of benefits, so it's not required. But it seems like a smart thing to do to sign out in support of it

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman – asks for HCC members to sign up to attend Commission meetings.

Outreach Committee Report – Emily Mowers is excused from the meeting, so Diana Hammer speaks. HCC will have a presence at upcoming Farmers markets – 3rd weekend of the month. Working on design of new outreach materials.

HCC Volunteers to attend these advisory boards/committees and give written updates – due to technical issues some reports were not presented.

City-County Planning Board – John Andrew – He was unable to attend the meeting. Land Use Planning wants HCC's input from their Districts. There may be a conservation easement for Avalanche Gulch.

Helena Public Arts Committee – Paige R. Myers – The Lyndale Tunnel Mural is almost complete. HPAC looking for suggestions for Welcome to Helena signs. There may be more sculptures around the Centennial Trail. They want more murals to be painted on buildings. If you know of an owner of building that would like one, let HPAC know.

Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council – Diana Hammer mentions the commission was considering dissolving this advisory board, but two of the commissioners wished for it to be tabled and re-considered. The HCC stated formally that it is against its dissolution. The clerk's office says that NMTAC is now redundant because of the formation of the MPO, but the HCC does not agree.

Citizen Conservation Board – Sydney Ausen – not able to attend

Solid Waste Master Plan Meetings – Denise R. Barber- the costs associated with the Solid Waste Masterplan should be published in August.

City-County Library Board – Anna Kratz – no meeting

Golf Advisory Board – Bob Schlack – says the golf course was busy this summer. They are discussing going solar. One of the water pumps is out of commission.

City-County Consolidated Parks Board – Pat Bik

Affordable Housing Trust Fund- Pat Bik

City County Consolidated Parks Board The North Star Park, an 18-acre area in the center of the North Star subdivision, is in project planning/public input stage, as described by Sanderson Stewart, park planners under contract for the project. Public comment is welcome. Planners considering use of artificial turf for high impact areas, which has an 8-10 year live span, generally.

Craig Marr reported that the pool is really busy and generally going well, with a few issues with pumps, etc. Also, the artificial turf has been installed at Legion Field, which helped considerably with the drainage after recent rains. The Civic Center tennis court renovation has been funded by the city. The next step is to contract for project specifications. Post-tension concrete is the most durable surface (lasting up to 50 years) and may be overlaid over existing asphalt without need for demolition. However, removal of present asphalt and replacement with asphalt is a less expensive fix, but lasts only half the duration. No final decision as of yet as to final design.

School District reported some damage at Warren School due to firecrackers and that Hawthorne School has a new climbing dome.

Prickley Pear Land Trust representative informed the Board that Prickley Pear Park south of the slag heaps in East Helena should be open to the public by the end of the summer.

Sean Logan reported that the city was going out for rebid on the Firetower restoration because the initial bidder from Vermont contractor wanted to remove the structure to another location to repair. The City is looking for restoration in place.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund Discussed how to restructure applications for affordable housing, with just over \$1,000,000 currently available. The Trust Fund expects to receive about \$100,000 from the City annually. Members agreed that two cycles annually for loan applications, open for a longer period of time, using the same criteria for section. Applications are available at all times on website. Deadlines for applications will be October 15 and April 15.

Water Quality Protection Board – Diana Hammer- she was not able to attend.

Chair Kuiper calls for any other public comments:

Diana Hammer mentions the dissolving NMTAC doesn't align with HCC's number one priority of safer routes to school, and a more walkable and bikeable community.

Nancy Perry – reminds others when doing outreach at a public event, please get person's contact information so that we can add their names to our outreach lists.

Paige Myers – Noticed that property owners were raising rents in trailer parks. Larger corporations were trying to buy up the land and possibly build apartments. In Missoula tenants formed a union and purchased the land.

1:49:39 Motion to adjourn made by Anna Kratz and seconded by Sean Morrison

1:50:37 Meeting Adjourned