



HCC Full Board Meeting

Minutes

November 20th, 2024, 7:00PM

Zoom:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82278269888>

or in person Room 326

6:30 Call to Order (close to 7:00PM)

In Attendance: John Andrew, Lori FitzGerald, Patricia Bik, Nancy Perry, Ben Kuiper, Sonda Gaub, Joe Lehman, Paige Reagan Myers, Sean Morrison, Chase Eaton, Robert Schlack, Katie Ryan, Anna Kratz, Bob Habeck, Denise Roth-Barber, Susan Steffens, Dylan Klapmeier, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator).

Excused: Diana Hammer, Brenda Valerio, Emily Mowers, Janet Zimmerman, Robert Hoffman, Ryan Schwochert

Members of the Public – Dr. Gregory Thomas, Anne Hausrath, Mary Beth Linder

Is Quorum established? Yes

Approval of October Full Board Minutes –

6:22 Chase Eaton makes a motion to approve the October Minutes. Paige Myers seconds

6:55 All members were in favor. Minutes were approved.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items - None

City Commission Update- None

Officer Reports

7:32 Chair – Ben Kuiper – Chair reminds HCC that November is the last meeting of 2024. Our next Full Board meeting will be January 22nd (the fourth Weds. of the month from 7-9PM)

7:51 Vice Chair- Sonda Gaub – nothing new to report.

Secretary – Diana Hammer – excused from meeting so no report

26:15 Treasurer – Lori FitzGerald – Since the beginning of fiscal year 2025 (the fiscal year starts July 1st) the HCC has spent \$50 on Neighborhood outreach block party, \$277 on the Open House, \$40 on the ArtWalk.

Denise Roth Barber asks what is the HCC's total budget? Lori FitzGerald, the treasurer, answers we have \$2450 in funds to spend for year 2025. So far this year we have spent \$368 and have a remaining balance to spend of \$2082.

New Business

8:10 Discussion of new or upcoming possible recommendations

Sonda Gaub is putting together a recommendation for a 3rd Fire Station that is mobile. She feels with the new apartment structure with 133 apartments, it is necessary. The fire department has the vehicles and staff to man such a mobile station. Sonda also thinks a 2nd recommendation would be for the city to not allow occupancy of the apartments until better fire suppression coverage is in place – e.g. the third fire station.

Bob Schlack agrees with Sonda. There is major traffic congestion near *Winco*. Denise R. Barber asks about the apartments: Sonda Gaub says it is called Summerville Flats. Apartments cost \$1200 for 500 sq. feet and \$2800 for a two-bedroom less than 1000 sq. feet.

Topics for upcoming meetings:

John Andrew suggests Michael O'Neil from the Helena Housing Authority.

Speakers: Sheila Danielson (finance director) -to speak about the City's budget. The HCC will not get access to more budget detail until the Commissioners do in April and May.

Redistricting of HCC districts (elections office – Clerk of Commission)

Topic/speaker for upcoming March HCC Open House – Bob Habeck thinks Transportation topic is a good idea. There is a whole city sidewalk master plan at a cost of \$30 million. It would be good to have David

Knoepke of Transportation speak on this topic and then have interactive conversations about it in small groups.

Paige Myers asks about intersection of Custer and Henderson – will there be a round-a-bout there?

Chase Easton answers yes, as he works for the engineering company designing it.

Coordinator Peggy Benkelman shows a possible Water Insert Flyer with HCC explanation on one side and invite to an Open House regarding transportation on the other side. Chair Kuiper would also like to have discussions about the city budget. The coordinator indicates she needs the Water Bill Insert readied and handed over to the city by February 15th so it can be in the March mailing.

Denise R. Barber liked how older Open Houses included break out sessions where citizens felt more heard giving their input.

Nancy Perry likes the idea of having presenters such as David Knoepke (Transportation Dept.) and then have breakout sessions as well.

Lori FitzGerald thinks we should always invite the Mayor and Commissioners as well.

Unfinished Business

27:35 Determine who is on the Nominating Committee – after open discussion it was determined that Denise R. Barber will be the chair of the Nominating Committee along with HCC members John Andrew, Pat Bik, and Bob Schlack.

29:56 Determine who wants to serve on the Budget Committee FY2026 budget which begins July 2025. Chair Kuiper thinks this should be determined immediately after the election of officers at the January 2025 meeting.

7:30PM Commission Attendees' Reports –

10/30 Bob Schlack - The Helena Public Arts Committee was established to promote awareness and involvement in public art and to identify public art projects that enhance the image of the arts community and recommend to the City Commission for consideration. The committee shall issue to the City Commission a report in October of each year. The committee will present a report summarizing what was accomplished this past year and making recommendations to the City Commission for the following year. (i.e. artwork on traffic boxes, Memorial Park band shell, walking mall murals, community collaboration, recycling dumpster murals, "Welcome to Helena" signage, and public art promotion with percentage for public Art Funding Ordinance).

2. Report from the city manager, Tim Burton from Jake Garcin, Public Information Officer, regarding City's Strategic Plan implementation strategies. The City Staff has been creating a document with strategies to implement the Strategic Plan. This was well received by the City Commission.

11/4 Emily Mowers – no report, Emily is excused from the meeting.

11/13 Katie Ryan and Bob Habeck -

Mike O'Neil from the Helena Housing Authority discussed ideas for potential new support housing as part of the Downtown Master Plan around Cruze Avenue and Cutler Street (south of Anchor Park). The city is also exploring options to 'reposition its housing portfolio', including renovations to Stewart Homes and new administrative approach for housing application.

David Knoepke, City Transportation System Director, described the status of a joint City-County projects at the intersection of West Custer and Henderson (entrance to the fairgrounds). A roundabout is being proposed at that location to better manage traffic. Approval and installation dates were not discussed. A parking lot paving project was also completed on the east side of the fairground Exhibit Hall.

David also described the status of the city-wide sidewalk inventory and code compliance review. All told, it is estimated that sidewalk and ramp repairs would cost ~\$21.7 million and ~\$30 million to complete an entire city sidewalk system. A priority repair approach will be presented to the Commission along with various funding options.

Renee McMahon, Human Resource Director, presented a status report regarding a revised employee pay plan. The purpose of the new compensation approach is to ensure for internal employee pay equity (retention), external candidate competitive wage (recruitment), being affordable and sustainable, and legally defensible. The Commission will be presented with more information and cost-estimates later.

Miranda Griffis, Sustainability & Recycling Coordinator, provided an update of current city projects involving solid waste and recycling, energy efficiencies, and water systems. Project highlights include the lithium battery recycling effort, food waste composting, wastewater pump motor replacements, solar projects, xeriscaping, and improvements to the Red Mountain flume.

11/18 Katie Ryan and Bob Habeck -Police Chief Perry requested Commission approval of MT Disaster and Emergency Services "MATIC", which is shared intelligence with other Montana police departments. He also requested confirmation of Officer George Weaver and his canine companion Billy, a Belgian Malinois. Officer Weaver will head up Helena Police Departments canine unit. Both requests were accepted unanimously by the city Commission.

Bid award for the City of Helena Wastewater Treatment Plant Primary scum pump station Replacement Project #19-42 was approved unanimously by the city Commission.

Director Leland requested the city commission to consider a resolution to set water rates for all customers of the City of Helena water system and also set rates for the wastewater system. Both resolutions were accepted by the city Commission.

Director Brink asked for the Commission to consider an extension of the planned completion and Final Plat of Phase 1 of the Westside Woods Major Phased Subdivision from Dec 2024 to Dec 2025.

The extension request was unanimously approved by the City Commission.

There was a discussion concerning the water quality with many people complaining on social media of the color and bad smell of the water lately. Director Leland explained that the water quality is good and this problem happens when the City changes the source of the water from Ten Mile station to the Missouri River station.

Pat Bik asks about the Cruze Avenue construction timeline? Bob Habeck answers there was nothing said that was yet concrete about housing for the homeless, but they were hopeful.

Denise R. Barber questions the repair at 10 mile. Such a repair is long-term, yet the city's take on it is that it is minor. Why then will it take all winter to complete? Katie Ryan adds that the city tried to repair its third water source, a well, but could not secure the replacement parts.

38:07 Denise R. B. asks if the HCC should request more detail about what is happening with Helena's water and pass that information on to the public.

39:08 Sonda Gaub states she thinks ARPA funds could have been used for the water pump repairs, but the money went elsewhere.

Lori FitzGerald questions why the department chooses to complete updates in the winter when the taste is worse in the winter. Ben Kuiper thinks the city will utilize a carbon filtration system for better taste.

Coordinator Report – Peggy Benkelman – continuing education presentations update – it is NOT mandatory that HCC members attend a training session in 2025, but you are welcome to do so. She will be contacting you regarding upcoming Commission attendance for Jan. Feb. and March. She shows Open House/Water Bill Insert on the screen for all to see. The HCC will have to get rid of helenacitizenscouncil.com – the reasoning for this is that it creates more phishing scams. We will devise a shortened URL for the future. Peggy B. reminds members to read the information document that was emailed to all of you from the Water Quality Protections District via Diana Hammer.

Outreach Committee Report – Emily Mowers – Emily is excused from the meeting, so nothing to report.

Advisory boards/committees attendees with written updates

City-County Planning Board – John Andrew – There is now the Watkins conservation easement north of Lincoln Rd managed by the 5 Valley Land Trust. The county and the city have been meeting to update their land use planning document that has not been updated since 2004. With the help of the firm Houseal Lavigne there should be updated information coming out in early January. There was a joint infrastructure study done with the County and they are trying to develop guidelines for annexation. Much of this depends on water, wells and storm systems. There have been problems, such as the North Start subdivision that ran out of water last year. There was also discussion about regional Fire Protection. For HCC members' info there will be a Railroad district topic discussion at the December 17th meeting.

Helena Public Arts Committee – Paige R. Myers – HPAC will do 8 more signal box covers in 2025. The RFP for them will go out in January with submissions due February 12th. Please encourage artists of any age to submit, groups can submit as well. There is a \$500 fee paid to the artist(s) for each piece. Paige M. reminds HCC members of the Holter's Gala this Friday. Carroll College received grant money for a PBS Radio station.

Citizen Conservation Board – Rob Hoffman and Janet Zimmerman – Rob Hoffman tried to log into the zoom for the meeting, but it kept taking him to a Planning meeting.

Solid Waste Master Plan Meetings – Denise R. Barber – no new updates, she will keep us informed.

City-County Library Board – Anna Kratz – The Library is working on an RFP to help fund the bookmobile. They are also doing more outreach with the Detention Center. They remind the public that the Turkey Challenge is Friday November 22nd from 10-6pm.

Golf Advisory Board – Bob Schlack – The course blew out its water pipes for winter. They are gearing up for leagues and tournaments for next year.

City-County Consolidated Parks Board – Pat Bik -After electing new officers, the Board invited reports.

The BID gave over the diagnosis and construction of a bathroom in Constitution Park to the City Parks Dept, which is looking at designs and hoping to secure TIF funding. Fire tower restoration has been left to Dick Anderson Construction, using TIF funding. The City has hired a contractor to design the rebuild of the Civic Center tennis courts, hopefully to overlay existing asphalt with concrete and avoid demolition costs. The City Parks Dept was unsure when the land from West Side Woods subdivision would be annexed. Neither the County nor the School District had much to report.

Mary Hollow from Prickley Pear Land Trust asked whether the Board had reviewed the "Green Play" study which was completed a number of years ago. The study recommended that a large City-County parks district be established to build and maintain parks throughout the area, including the trails maintained by Prickley Pear. At this time, Prickley Pear and the City pay for the maintenance of most outdoor recreation sites, and county residents contribute very little. The Green Play plan attempted to spread out the costs of park maintenance. Prickley Pear has done considerable work during the past summer on 10 Mile, The Grove, and the new park along Prickley Pear Creek in East Helena. The Board decided to put the Green Play study on the agenda for discussion next month.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund- Pat Bik - this committee did not meet.

Water Quality Protection District – Diana Hammer – Diana is excused from the meeting, but the Coordinator reminds members to read the Water Quality handout provided to them in an email.

MPO – Joe Lehman (Pat Bik) – neither member could attend. Timing of meeting is bad, as it occurs during working hours. They will try to attend in the future

Downtown Business Improvement District – Bob Schlack – The ArtWalk was a success. There are still small business improvement grants available. The Christmas decorations are going up and the Parade of Lights is on for November 29th. Alysia Ryan (BID director) helped gather input for *Helena Forward* for the City.

58:00 HCC Chair asks for any more public comment – there was none.

58:19 Sonda Gaub motions to adjourn meeting, Pat Bik seconds the motion.

58:28 Meeting Adjourned