



HCC Full Board Meeting

## Minutes

Weds. June 26th, 7-9PM

In person room 326 or via Zoom

### **6:31 Meeting Called to order by Chair Ben Kuiper**

**In Attendance** –Lori FitzGerald, John Andrew, Diana Hammer, Patricia Bik, Nancy Perry, Joe Lehman, Ben Kuiper, Sonda Gaub, Paige Myers, Chase Eaton, Bob Schlack, Janet Zimmerman, Sydney Ausen, Dylan Klapmeier, Susan Steffens, Bob Habeck, Peggy Benkelman (coordinator)

**HCC Members Excused:** Sean Morrison, Emily Mowers, Ryan Schwochert, Rick Boleware, Anna Kratz, Brenda Valerio, Denise Roth-Barber

**Members of the public:** Commissioner Sean Logan, Ed Coleman

**Quorum established** - yes

**7:31 Approval of April 2023 Full HCC Board Minutes** – all members were in favor, no changes or additions. Minutes approved. Motion to approve made by Pat Bik and seconded by Sydney Ausen.

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

**8:01 City Commission Update** – Commissioner Sean Logan mentions that at the July 10<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting staff will be addressing the issue of having FTE positions filled at the new Fire Station. 10:32 HCC members Sonda Gaub asks if it is a good idea for the HCC to also present an official recommendation? Commissioner Logan leaves that decision up to the HCC and defers to the staff.

### **Approval of New HCC District #5 member Katie Ryan:**

**15:58 Motion to approve** made by Chase Eaton, seconded by Lori FitzGerald

**16:03 Call for vote. All were in favor, non-opposed.**

### **17:03 Ed Coleman (City of Helena Waste Management) speaks**

Ed Coleman worked for DEQ for 20 years and then started with the City of Helena in May 2021. There is an interlocal agreement where the city owns and manages the transfer station and the county owns the landfill. A city employee actually manages the landfill. We (the city) pays the county and the county pays the city. Last year the city hired a consultant to assist with the Solid Waste Master Plan. The city is looking into the future as to how to budget things – these ideas will be coupled with a citizen survey. The public is generally satisfied with the way things are running.

The city has had steering committee meetings and public hearings. Options that were considered are all grass clippings go to the landfill because of the smell, a new recycling consolidation building, implementation of universal recycling and waste diversion (a private entity does this).

There are about 1500 persons using curbside recycling at a cost of \$8 per month. Should everyone be forced to participate in this at a cost of \$11-\$14 per month? Only about 15% of the population are participating in curbside recycling.

Currently there is a 3000lb limit for weight for persons to dump. Some people would rather see a pay as you throw system. Another idea brought up is to allow direct haul to the landfill, bypassing the Transfer Station. The city is also working on increased education outreach.

Recycling: it rarely goes to the landfill. The city typically must pay Pacific Steel or 406 Recycling to take the recyclables. The City of Helena has to haul glass to Salt Lake City where they make it into fiberglass. We used to be able to haul glass to AshGrove Cement, but because of bottle stoppers and other plastics that plugged their screens, that is currently not an option.

Look at <https://beheardhelena.com/integrated-solid-waste-master-plan> for more details.

And Nancy Perry says, I don't understand what county garbage is? Is it garbage from households in the valley outside of the city limits? Do trucks go to pick it up, or do county residents bring it in.

Ed Coleman answers: County garbage is household garbage from people in in the local county. They call it the Scratch Gravels and it's an area around Helena. And so, they pay into the overall funding of the solid waste operations. I think they pay \$93 a year is their assessment, and city people pay a \$92 ish as their assessment. County people can haul their waste to the transfer station, and they have a tag like the rest of us, and they get the 3,000 pounds, or they can pay Tri-County who does private trash pick-up.

Diana Hammer asks: The HCC was conceptually supportive of the upgrades to the Transfer Station, but we couldn't fully support it without any costs available. Are those cost estimates available now?

Ed Coleman replies: Our consultants are currently putting that information together. And they're using 2024 dollars – so we won't know the exact costs for a while. All the information should be in the Solid Waste Master Plan due out August/September, keep looking on the beheardhelena page.

Ed Coleman replies to Bob Schlack about lowering poundage from 3000 to 1500. It probably won't make a difference in cost to customers because the city still has to pay employees to be on site at the transfer station.

Ed Coleman - The cost to maintain the landfill and transfer station will still be expensive. 37:59 Recycling is expensive, but it is worthwhile.

**38:48 Sean Logan** comments on the budget of recycling: it is not a revenue generator.

Ed Coleman adds that info is updated on the recycling page because commodity prices change.

**Susan Steffens** asks if the current curbside recycling is favorable? Ed Coleman answers yes, it is very favorable, but the response to universal curbside recycling has been very negative.

**41:54 Diana Hammer comments:** she says the HCC is on record opposing increasing residential solid waste rates when less than 5% of residential permit holders exceed the 3000 lbs of disposal. The average Helenan disposes of less than 1000 lbs of waste per year. Why not reduce the amount that Helenans can dispose of for free and instead charge those who dispose of the most thereby encouraging further diversion. I imagine that would result in additional cost savings for the city and for us, the taxpayers. There are many ways to reduce waste, for instance: reduce consumption, reuse materials, restore, thrift, compost etc. Please consider the EPA waste reduction hierarchy.

**43:08 Sean Logan** says the city did its own waste reduction study in 2022. Some of these proposed ideas are actually more expensive.

**45:49 – Diana Hammer** – Please elaborate on how reducing the free waste disposal option was considered. Ed Coleman replies, he will get back to you on that.

**45:57 Susan Steffens** – asks how much use is there for the recycling bins around the city and at the landfill? Ed Coleman says there are 7 sites and they are very heavily used.

**Diane Hammer.** I continue to believe that the city is not weighing the benefits of waste reduction but focusing mostly on the costs.

**Ed Coleman:** So we put out the survey, and we took the information that we received from the public, and we weighed that heavily, because those are the people that felt the need to respond to our survey. They're the ones that took the time to do it. They're the ones that are average, everyday people. And so, we weighed their input very heavily. And that's how a lot of our decisions have been made, or at least here.

**48:43 Commissioner Logan** says as an elected official, cost is a pretty important consideration for me. As is evident from local elections, citizens did not want to pay more for bonds or schools or levies.

**49:52 Ed Coleman** says they are trying to promote recycling in every avenue i.e. make compost and sell it back to the public at \$60 a ton, outreach education, paint drives, having a sustainability coordinator.

**50:53 Sydney Ausen** – is this master plan treated as a recommendation that the city can take up overtime as funds are available?

**Ed Coleman replies:** it is like a menu, things will be prioritized based on need. We will build plans out of the recommendations that come from the Master Plan. You will see them as budget proposals.

**Sonda Gaub** says thanks for coming to the meeting. We have a great recycle program, everything is so close. She asks Ed about textile recycling.

**56:15 Ed Coleman responds:** no new recyclables that he knows about. He would like to work again with AshGrove Cement for glass recycling. It would be nice to have new composting equipment.

**56:15 Bob Habeck** – Within this final master plan, I still don't fully understand what I pay for. There are 8-10 things I didn't even know I was getting. Need to better educate the public and get the message out. I would like to know what I am getting if I am charged more.

**59:39 Sean Logan** and other commissioners were given a tour of the landfill and transfer station. This really drove home what a good system we have here in Helena. Ours is the most affordable in the State (except for Butte).

**Ed Coleman** breaks down what the expenses are within the \$194.00. He says 50% goes to collection, 31% disposal, 11% city recycling and 8% curbside recycling.

**1:01:24 Diana Hammer** asks if the city has plans to implement any of the recommendations from the 2021 Strategic Plan for Waste Reduction?

**1:01:18 Ed Coleman** responds money will be used for Outreach and Education. The city is also working towards improving green waste composting. They received a grant for Food Waste Composting as well – 12 business within the community will be participating. Soon the public can apply for receiving 4 chickens and a chicken coupe (partnered with local Boy Scouts). This too will help with food waste.

**1:03:22 Paige Myers** says – thanks for coming to our meeting. Has there been any discussion about public education regarding the benefits and costs of waste reduction? If citizens are aware of this, more can voice their opinion and the city can get a better view of what citizens want.

**Ed Coleman** responds – yes there has been quite a lot of education and outreach. They have created recycling videos that are available on their website. **Commissioner Logan adds** that the consultants hired did a robust job of outreach and education – information is still available on the beheardhelena site.

**1:05:20 Pat Bik** – asks given those costs, cutting pickup to every other week would save the city 25% of the total. Ed Coleman responds – that was not what they heard, nor was it what the public wanted. Ed says they appreciate the HCC's help and input.

**1:08:07 Chair Ben Kuiper opens the floor** for Vice-Chair nominations. Sonda Gaub volunteers to be Vice-Chair.

**1:09:46 Sydney Ausen motions** to appoint Sonda Gaub as Vice- Chair. Lori FitzGerald seconds the motion.

**1:10:11 Vote by acclamation. 1:09:58 All were in favor – motion approved.** Sonda Gaub is now Vice Chair.

## **Officer Reports**

Chair – Ben Kuiper – thanks all HCC members for all their work on the budget recommendation.

Vice Chair – none as Sonda Gaub is newly elected

Secretary – Diana Hammer – mentions that Heather Graham from the ARC sports facility wishes to thank the HCC for their support.

Treasurer – Lori FitzGerald – She too wishes to thank all HCC members who helped with the Budget Recommendation. The HCC still had \$1500 left in their budget as of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Maybe the coordinator can get a newer phone for better texting and pictures.

## **New Business**

Update on a yearly HCC calendar – moved to next meeting due to time. Outreach Committee will put this together.

## **Commission Attendees' Reports –**

**6/3 Ben Kuiper** – Zoning, variance applications and resolutions were discussed. Most were not pertinent to HCC.

**6/12 Chase Eaton** – David Knoepke gave an update on some parking reforms that are being considered for downtown Helena. It sounds like the commission will be considering the formation of a parking advisory board on Monday night. They will also be considering treating the City owned parking garages as surface lots and treating the downtown area as one parking zone with consistent rates/fees. The parking garage's arm bars would be replaced with kiosks that would also appear throughout downtown.

The Housing Authority is seeking to re-position their Section 9 Housing into Section 8. This would NOT result in a loss of any rent assisted housing. The goal is to increase the federal subsidy that we receive locally from about 80% of the fair market rent evaluation to 100% of that. This process would also allow the ownership to transfer to one of the Housing Authority's subsidiary non-profits which would allow them to build additional housing and control the supply locally -- otherwise you can't build additional public housing per the federal rules.

Helena has three Tax Increment Financing zones (Railroad, downtown, and capital mall area). Only the downtown and railroad areas have TIF boards. Both boards are hard to fill and get a quorum. The boards are a big strain on City employees to manage and liaison with. They would like to consolidate the boards into one with three representatives from each of the three TIF areas and are going to meet with the independent TIF boards to gauge their appetite for that.

Two proposed pedestrian crossings were shown. The first is on Lyndale and would relocate the existing crossing at Warren Street further east to where Ewing and Rodney intersect Lyndale. The second is for the Centennial trail where it would cross North Montana near Bozeman Street. Each crossing had three alternatives, the first is just a simple cross walk with overhead pedestrian signs (RRFBs - those flashing lights similar to what are on Benton by the transfer station). The first alternative for the Montana x-ing has a skewed approach which is not ideal for ADA compliance. The second alternatives would introduce bulb outs and reduce the x-ing widths from about 60' curb to curb down to 52'. The Montana crossing would be shifted. The third would introduce a median pedestrian island instead of the bulb outs. An optional enhancement for the Montana crossing would replace the RRFB with a pedestrian hybrid beacon (HAWK). The preferred alternative is bulb outs with the overhead RRFB. The Montana x-ing could be constructed in 2025. A timeline for the Lyndale crossing is unknown, there is not currently budget for that x-ing (there is for Montana Avenue).

The City Vehicle Maintenance shop needs about \$1M in capital improvements. They are asking for permission to solicit banks for offers and would like to present those offers in July for approval.

The intersection of Lawrence and Last Chance Gulch (by Gold Bar and the Union) needs to be re-paved. This would require a re-design of the curb ramps for ADA compliance. Additionally, the intersection no longer meets the warrants for a signalized intersection. Two way stop control is warranted but the preferred alternative is all way stop control. They want more public input on that decision. The proposal now is to either bag the lights or set them to flash for an all-way stop intersection to see how it functions. An all-way stop should allow better pedestrian flow in particular.

- **6/17 Diana Hammer** – focused heavily on transportation issues. Tabled decision to award \$1.2 M bid to install 2 left-hand turn lanes on North Benton
- Public comment opposed this as unnecessary, expensive, and could create an increased pedestrian risk.
- Commission tabled a recommendation presented by the Clerk of commission, Claiborne to dissolve the non-motorized Travel Advisory Committee. The rationale presented was that with the formation of the MPO (the municipal planning organization) that NMTAC is redundant.
- After several public comments opposing this and supporting the NMTAC, including Chair Kuiper and NMTAC Board members, referencing HCC's stance regarding safe routes to school walking & biking as a priority for our community and tech future will also be discussed at a future admin meeting.

**6/26 Lori FitzGerald** – presentations were given on Wildland Fire. Public Health Dept. received new accreditation. AARP presented information asking Helena to become an age friendly community. There was a change in code regarding billboards and electronic signage coupled with a new permitting process. Commissioner Dean expressed concerns about trains carrying toxins through Helena as well as trains blocking intersections for long periods of time.

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

**Outreach Committee Report** – HCC will have a presence at upcoming Farmers markets – 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend of the month.

**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 –  
**Helena Public Arts Committee** – Paige R. Myers – date of meeting changed – no report  
**Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council** –  
**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** – Pat Bik  
**Affordable Housing Trust Fund**- Pat Bik  
**Water Quality Protection Board** – Diana Hammer – Prickly Pear Land Trust led a tour of its restoration work on the 7 mile creek riparian area.

**1:32:04 Motion to adjourn** made by Sonda Gaub and seconded by Sydney Ausen

**1:33:18 Meeting Adjourned**