

# HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE SUMMARY November 19, 2020



## **GENERAL MEMBERS**

■ Betsy Ross

□ Brian Barnes

### **CITY OF HELENA STAFF**

□ Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager

☑ Kristi Ponozzo, Director, P & R, Open Lands

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☐ VACANT

## **HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL**

#### **ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS**

**Helena Tourism Alliance Representative** 

# **PPLT Representative**

☐ Nate Kopp *absent* 

## **VIA ZOOM MEETING**

TIME: November 19, 2020; 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

# **Zoom Meeting Log-in Details:**

https://zoom.us/j/97058538596?pwd=VXFqN3podkg1SVpnQTYxNFM4OWo5UT09

Meeting ID: 970 5853 8596

Passcode: 519970 One tap mobile

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#### Call to Order

• Chairman, Eric Sivers called the November 19, 2020 to order at 5:31 pm. A quorum was established.

## Welcome/Introductions/Visitors

Tony Jewett, Joan Miles, Helena Civic TV, Chris Bradley, Gloria Tatchell, Christine Deveny, Jeff Bradley, Ben Carreon, Jeff Vantine, Michele Webster, Melissa Hornbein, Lindsey Gilstrap, Jerry Wells, Denny Palmer, Matt Culpo, Aaron Fiaschetti, Susie, Lisa Bay, Robert Rasmussen

## **Minutes Approval**

• After review of the minutes and with no noted corrections, Brian moved to approve the minutes as presented. Karen seconded. Motion carried.

#### **HOLMAC Action Items**

None.

#### **New Business**

## Public Listening Session for Helena Open Lands Projects

Final Listening Session for 2020 Major Projects – Helena Open Lands

- Kristi: Brad will be presenting our final list of major projects for the upcoming year that was put out 10 days ago for review along with the Environmental Analysis for each project.
- After each item is presented we will ask for any questions. We would like to reserve comments for the end of the meeting.

## **CITY PROJECTS**

## **Old Shooting Range Restroom Installation Project**

- This project will be very similar to the restrooms that were placed at Beattie Street and at the
  Park City Trailhead. We hope to place a double vaulted restroom in with a hard surface parking
  lot adjacent to the restroom as well as access to the amenities that currently exist at this site as
  well as the addition of picnic tables. The project would involve some additional work on the
  surface of the Old shooting Range parking area. This parking area needs to be resurfaced and
  graded.
- As discussed in previous meetings, the parks department does have a current grant application that would provide funding for this project. This grant is with the Missouri River Resource Advisory Committee; however, we have not had ranking yet due to the COVID pandemic. We are excited to increase the quality of the Old Shooting Range Trailhead. One of the items on the horizon includes the Brooklyn Bridge to Tucker trail. This would mean coming across Forest Service and into the Entertainment Trail. As we look into the future, this trailhead will become busier and we will want to get ready for not only the use we currently have, but also the use we foresee out into the future.

# **Limekiln Parking Area Realignment Project**

• This project involves the realignment of the Limekiln parking area. This is an impromptu parking spot off Limestone Road and at the bottom off the Rocky Road and Prickly Pear Trails. It is very difficult to get in and out of this parking area, especially if you have to back out of it. In doing so, you end up in the traffic flow of Limekiln which is not a safe road to begin with.

- Our goal is to change the position of the current parking area by moving it deeper into the hill to where people can get backed up and turned around as they exit.
- Both the Old Shooting Range and the Limekiln Parking Area as well as all projects presented this
  evening have had an Environmental Assessment (EA) done. As you can imagine, when looking at
  a project and a highly disturbed sight (in the case of all three parking area projects), we aren't
  looking at disturbing any ground that hasn't experienced disturbance before. This is a fairly low
  dollar project that will be implemented by city staff. That will help keep costs down.

## **Mount Ascension Parking Area Expansion Project**

- The third project that is included on our final list is looking at expanding the size of the Mount Ascension Trailhead up at the intersection of the 2006 Trail and Arrowroot Road.
- As stated before, this has become a more popular trailhead and it has never really been
  organized in any fashion. City parks staff and volunteers did fence off this area this summer due
  to the fact that we had parking occurring off park property on privately owned property. We feel
  the need to bring more organization to this parking area by increasing the width and designating
  the parking spots. Our goal is to eventually provide more amenities such as trash receptacles
  and a pet waste station at this sight.

### Questions

- C Clifford: Ms. Clifford asked if city staff could provide more background on why these three projects have been prioritized. They sound like they have some value, but she wanted to know if there was some sort of criteria used in prioritizing the projects.
- Brad provided reasoning beginning with the Old Shooting Range. When the parks department originally applied for the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) grant, we did not know there would be a delay in the construction of the Brooklyn to Tucker Trail. The parks department believes this will eventually become a reality. We will see a substantial increase in the amount of use at this trailhead because when users arrive at the Park City Trailhead, they will have an option of whether they proceed back on the Ridge Trail or choose to take the Brooklyn Bridge route which means they will end up at the Old Shooting Range. With the increased usage there, we see a need for a manageable restroom. We have had public request that we provide portable restrooms at this sight and we feel portable restrooms will not be durable enough should we have issues with vandalism. Therefore, we are looking at a restroom facility that we can manage.
- Limekiln: We have realized for a number of years that we have had an issue at Limekiln. What Brad has seen is increased trailhead use to where now it is common to see three or four vehicles at the location making it unsafe for city staff to plow without getting into traffic flow. The parks department staff have observed users turning around in community member's driveways and this is simply not acceptable. It is a safety concern.
- Mount Ascension: The Mount Ascension project is actually a project that HOLMAC and parks staff have discussed for several years. We had a HOLMAC field trip where we looked at more formal trailhead options on that side of Mount Ascension and it was the opinion of HOLMAC members that the current parking area that has just kind of become a "de facto" parking area as we have never really identified that area as a formal trailhead. People started parking and accessing Mount Ascension from the intersection of 2006 and Arrowroot. Therefore, in looking at this sight, we looked at what we could do to make it a more functional parking area. This involves increasing the width of the area to where we can designate parking spots instead of

- being so unorganized. We were and continue to have problems with overflow during peak seasons because people don't understand how they should park.
- Based on this, these are the items we have identified as not functioning well and needing
  improvement. As everyone is aware, on the original list, there was also issues regarding middle
  DeFord. We have decided to work with the Engineering and Transportation Departments to see
  if there is a better solution for that trailhead. In regards to the other trailheads, we are
  recommending that we move ahead with management actions that we can implement.
- Claudia: Do we have user data for the trailheads listed above? She is curious about what kind of information we have about who is using these trails and traffic conditions.
- Brad we do have user data for the Old Shooting Range Trailhead from the 2017 study and at
  the same time, there was user data from the Mount Ascension Trailhead as well. We really don't
  have user data for the Limekiln Trailhead. That is more staff observation. While trying to manage
  that trailhead this summer, we had a request to provide a trash receptacle at this sight. It is
  simply not a manageable trailhead. It is basically people parking on the side of the road at this
  point. All of the items discussed have been evaluated over a number of years by city staff and
  HOLMAC.

#### PROJECTS SUBMITTED FROM TRAIL USERS

#### **Directional Trails Exit Trail**

- Brad stated that Eric Grove proposed a project that would involve making a trail connection at the bottom of the Directional Trail and the Eddye West Trail.
- Currently, if people choose to make a second trip down the Directional Trail, they have the option of going up or down an existing Jeep Trail. It seems that trail users are preferring to go downhill and then they return back up to the Directional Trail. The users go down the trail. In order to return back up Eddye West, they are ascending up the Arrowroot Road. At this point, Arrowroot Road has very limited sight distances and some very serious issues with washboard surfaces. It is not a safe road. Brad expressed concern about some of the traffic accidents that have occurred at that location. Anyone who has spent any time up there has witnessed accidents in the wintertime. The road has deteriorated significantly.
- Eric is proposing to keep the returning traffic on the open lands system and simply make a short connection between the bottom of the Directional Trail and Eddye West.

#### Questions

None.

## **New Climbing Routes**

- Brad: The Helena Climbing Coalition presented a project which will involve establishing additional climbing routes on the rock faces that are located above the 1906 Trail, specifically between the top of Mount Helena and the 1906 Trail (aka: Mount Helena Cliffs).
- Currently the coalition has established 19 climbing routes on those rock faces. Their proposal involves the establishment of 15 additional routes.
- The Parks Department is very excited about working with the climbing coalition on this project. The initial project went off without a hitch and people really seem to be enjoying the climbing routes. It has not been difficult for the parks department to manage the use, nor has it been difficult for our partner, the Helena Climbing Coalition, to assist in the management of use.

• The City of Helena Parks Department will have final approval of the location of the climbing routes. It is our goal to ensure that those who enjoy free climbing up to the Devil's Kitchen Cave can continue to do so without a designated climbing route so it doesn't conflict with what they are doing. We will leave a quiescent area around the Devil's Kitchen Cave and will then work with the coalition to make certain that the trails that access the belay pad at the bottom of the routes are put in with the least disturbance as possible.

## Questions

None.

## **Proposal for ADA-Compliant Trail on Mount Helena**

- This next project was proposed by the Helena Rotary Club. This project involves meeting a longterm goal for the City of Helena Parks Department and the citizenry of Helena.
- They are proposing the installation of an ADA trail on Mount Helena. Currently, we don't have what we would classify as an ADA Trail or a trail with very little grade to it that can be used by all trail users.
- There are a number of items that are outlined in this proposal, but basically this trail would leave the lower level of Mount Helena (Reeder's Village) Trailhead and proceed in a westerly direction eventually intersecting with the Bitterroot Way Trail and proceeding to a "knob" where trail users would be able to have an overview of the city. This trail would be a wide trail. It would be surfaced with decomposed granite. At various points, we will have benches along the way for trail users that would like to take a break. Any of you who are familiar with the surface of the Saddle Drive ADA trail that the parks department built off the south Helena exit or the trails that Prickly Pear on their William Street 10-Mile property, will understand what we are proposing and the importance of this proposal.
- The Rotary Club has submitted an outline of their budget and have been involved in raising funds to pay for the materials. The construction of this project would be completed by park staff members.
- Brad stated that he and/or Tony Zammit are available to answer questions regarding this project.

## Questions

- Betsy: Betsy mentioned that she noticed this project could take two seasons to complete. Is there any sort of timeline or goals as far as what you think could be accomplished within this first year?
- Brad stated that we will look at moving ahead and starting the trail within the first year. The two
  year project is more related should the trail eventually carry on and connect to LeGrande. That
  is a long-term goal for this trail. The first phase is to get up to the Overlook and we feel that can
  be accomplished in the first season. There are still some funding questions to be answered that
  the Rotary Club is diligently working on. That would probably be the only issue keeping this first
  phase from being completed (budgeting issues).
- Tony Z added that the Rotary Club currently has approximately \$20,000 covered. Some of this is contingent upon funds getting spent. There is at least \$5,000 that is contingent on getting spent by the end of this year. Tony is hopeful we can get this process done so we can proceed to present to the City Commission for a "yay or nay" vote on that. We have had tremendous outpouring from the public. We have applied for and acquired grants to assist with this project. The ultimate goal is to make sure that the parks department doesn't have to spend any of their

- budget on this project. He stated the Rotary really wants this project to be a "Rotary and Community based" project.
- Claudia: Did you get the independent living centers and/or disability community advocates involved in this project? Tony stated that he reached out to the non-motorized community and the city's ADA Compliance Committee. He has had a number of conversations with Lewis and Clark County Wayfinding group as well. There has been a lot of homework that has been done with this project. For example, it was at one of the ADA Compliance Committee meetings that led to the idea of having benches along this route so people that needed to stop along this half mile route would have an area to sit down. It will also leave enough space for some sort of interpretive signage as well as an ADA bench so wheelchairs passing or those turning around will have enough room to do so.
- Karen: In looking at the proposed budget for this project, is this amount for just the first phase of the project or is this for the entire project? Brad this budget that will take us to completion just to the overlook which was the original Rotary proposal. At that point, from parks staff analysis, we could bring the trail into the new Ambrose Trail and bring the new Ambrose Trail into ADA compliance and have that trail proceed to the west. Eventually, after you pass the Westridge Development, a new trail would need to be constructed that would ultimately come down into LeGrande. The long-term goal will be to have a route to connect the LeGrande trail to the Mount Helena Trail. But we have items that we need to look into first and figure out how to manage this as far as the LeGrande Cannon Trail itself. Therefore, right now, our goal is to complete this first phase to the overlook.

# **Proposal for Rerouting Portion of Trail above Beattie**

- The final project we are looking at involves the reroute of the PayDirt Trail. This was proposed by Prickly Pear Land Trust.
- As many may know, there was a slight reroute done to have the existing Prickly Pear Trail come
  into the Beattie Trailhead at a lower position. When we did this, we looked at the fact that maybe
  it was time to realign PayDirt as well. We knew that would be a more major-sized project and
  would need to be reviewed by the entire community.
- The idea is to take out the fall line, the difficult to manage section, that is near the bottom of PayDirt Trail and basically have the trail proceed in a westerly direction off of a switch back so that you use more distance to eliminate the grade and avoid some of the rocky areas that the trail currently crosses. Basically, we will make this trail more user-friendly and easier to manage erosion.

## Questions

None.

## Kristi – Final Words

- Kristi then stated that she wanted to remind everyone that there were several proposals for
  projects along Davis Gulch including a proposal to rework the two bike trails at that location (as
  presented by Matt Culpo) as well as a proposal from Meg Bishop to create an ADA trail and make
  that trail accessible.
- Those items do not appear on this list as this was the list that we were doing assessments on and that we will actually be taking before the Commission for approval. It is our goal to form a

working group this year to evaluate the projects on Davis Gulch. We will be taking this idea to the Commission as well.

- The city staff will commit to:
  - ♣ Facilitating three meetings for the working group
  - We will propose that the working group consist of a member of HOLMAC, the people who proposed said projects (Matt Culpo and Meg Bishop)
  - ♣ A representative from the City of Helena Community Development Department
  - ♣ A representative from (1) Helena Hikes, (2) Helena Trails Alliance, and (3) Montana Bicycle Guild.
- This information will all be included in the presentation to the Commissions, not for approval of a project, but for approval of the process that will end in a potential proposal that would then be taken back and presented to the Commission.
- Kristi then asked for general comments about the proposed projects. We have been compiling all of the comments that we have received to date. Those have been posted on our website. We have been responding to all comments and will continue to do so. We will keep this public comment period opened until December 4, 2020 at which time we will add the additional comments to our comment document. We will present all those comments to the Commission for introduction on December 16, 2020 and final approval on December 23, 2020.

## **Public Comment**

- Lisa Bay: Thank you for clarifying how the working group will work. She then stated she had a couple of housekeeping things to ask about. She asked about what the city steps are in reaching out to the public for a meeting such as this (aside from emails that several of us received)?
- Kristi stated that we follow the public process that is outlined in Appendix P of the Helena Open Lands Work Plan (See Appendix P Attached). We did email, news release, social media release, and posted the information at all trailheads.
- Lisa then stated she did not see a posting at Rodney Street Trailhead. Eric Sivers said the trail Lisa mentioned is not located on city property. Brad added that we posted at 20 trailheads. While we hope nothing happens to the posts, we can't guarantee that people won't take them down. We don't post at other sister agency sights and Rodney Street Trailhead is managed by the BLM.
- Lisa then asked if everything is published in the newspaper. Kristi stated that we send out a news release through the city's Public Information Officer. It is sent to all major newspapers and television networks. Lisa said she hasn't seen anything. Kristi stated she did an interview on KTVH and there has been a couple articles in the newspaper.
- Lisa then mentioned that the link to the Environmental Assessments doesn't look like it is working. Jennifer corrected that while we were on the zoom meeting.
- **Joan Miles**: Joan asked for clarification on where we are in this process? She also asked if HOLMAC has formally endorsed this final proposal as there was no quorum at the last meeting.
- Eric Sivers stated that city staff is still work through what they are proposing. HOLMAC's role would follow after city staff have something that they are comfortable taking to the City Commission for approval.
- Joan then mentioned discussions that have taken place regarding a safer exit route from the Directional Trail. This needs to happen. It's not just people coming down the Directional Trail, but the fact that whole area attracts a lot more bikers and fast cyclists. There is a real danger along that lower part of Eddye McClure West. This is included in the comments that Kristi

- referred to. Are the items in the comments going to be a part of the work plan that the city commits to looking at? Joan then recommended that we look at mitigating measures for this area and would like to see this included in next years' work plan.
- Brad: We ran into a situation here where rerouting Eddye West was not part of the original proposal. When we had the second listening session, all of a sudden there was a desire to implement a considerable reroute of the existing trail. That is a project in itself and needs to go through a public comment period. What we felt is that if there is a reroute that can be agreed upon, that project needs to move through the major project process in 2021. At this time, what is in front of us is a connecting trail (sessioning trail). Again, we are basically looking at two different proposals.
- Joan what about looking at ways to mitigate the safety issues at that location?
- Brad if those mitigation issues can be done and don't warrant major project status, then we can look at that this next year. Things such as signage can be look at in this next years' work plan. But again, if we are looking at changing the Eddye West trail significantly, then that is something that would need to include public involvement. We are not refusing to look at the issues at this trail. We are just stating that if what is being proposed is considered a "major project", it will need to go through the entire process. If some of the items you are mentioning are minor items, such as additional signage to increase awareness, those are items that we can do with the general work plan and would not need to go through a major project analysis.
- Joan then asked if the city can commit to putting this request into the work plan while the reconstruction that Eric Groves proposal moves forward? Brad stated that our final work plan isn't finalized yet, but this is certainly something we can look at. The work plan will be a simpler process as we are no longer required for this document to go through Commission. It will simply be a general outline of items to be accomplished in that work plan period. Joan asked if the public will be able to see the work plan. HOLMAC participates in that work plan and that is the next step we will go into as we plan our 2021 season. We will being working on the work plan with the goal of having that ready for spring field season. It also gives HOLMAC the opportunity to see how that matches up with our budget.
- Joan requested that we put into the work plan that the city will look at safety measures at Eddye McClure West and the Directional Trail. Public participation for that work plan will be either providing those comments to the parks department or through HOLMAC. Joan stated that "she has provided those comments, please".
- Eric responded to Joan's concerns. He stated he is committed to submitting a public project for next season for a realignment of Eddye West that Joan has referred to. But Eric would like to do this in a collaborative fashion with folks from the hiking advocacy groups as well as the mountain bike advocacy groups. He suggested visiting the sight Nate Kopp to pin out some possibilities. That way, people can visualize what we are talking about and how that would help increase safety and at the same time, make it an enjoyable experience for everyone. In addition, Eric stated that he does support the projects that have been picked and reviewed this evening.
- **Jeff Bradley**: Jeff stated that all the projects submitted and discussed look good. He is happy to hear about the parking that is going to be put in at both Limekiln and up at the top of Arrowroot to the top of Mount Ascension. Thanks to the city for going through this process.
- **Tony Jewitt**: Tony reiterated everything that Joan said and stressed the important of making sure we deal with the issue of safety, now.

- **Jerry Wells**: Jerry began by thanking Kristi and Brad for being here tonight. He stated he appreciates their great efforts through this process.
- Jerry then suggested that there is an opportunity for the use of volunteers who represent the various interest groups in the trail system who could go out, using an inventory system that would be vetted through the city, and evaluate some of the trails or portions of them. They could perhaps get a better look at a variety of issues to include erosion, grading gradients, etc. And while we all have our own thoughts about the trail system, this would give us an opportunity to go out together and see if we can't reach some conclusions on how we might want to deal with some of the issues within our trail system to include the issue of social trails. The longer we wait to deal with social trails, the harder it will be to ever deal with them.
- Claudia Clifford: Could you comment, as the city department, why we should move forward with some sort of social trail assessment? Brad stated that a major component of our trail maintenance contract with Prickly Pear Land Trust this year involved analyzing our entire system. That was the driving force behind this year's maintenance effort. At the same time, we had a goal in both the first half and second half of our contract with Prickly Pear Land Trust of closing a certain distance of social trails. Over the years we have done a lot of work on mapping social trails. A lot of that work was done in 2012 by HOLMAC. Since that time, we have worked on closing the most problematic of the social trails and that is what we did this year in creating a goal within the contract to close "XXX" amount of social trails. Brad and Nate Kopp went out and identified those. These are items where the work is ongoing. That inventory of the trail system both from a condition standpoint and inventory on sight will always be a part of each years' contract. Between city staff and HOLMAC, we are going to need to define what the analysis needs will be. At that point, we will need to determine if we will have to use an outside company for something and how we are going to fund that. The analysis that Prickly Pear conducts is a condition analysis to look at what areas of the trails need work. If we are to look at a system analysis, that would be a different process.
- **Eric Groves**: Eric added that he likes Jerry's suggestion. Following Jerry's suggestion, maybe we could do a pilot project and get people engaged in talking about the trail system in Helena.
- Jake Gunther: Jake stated he supports the project on the table this year. In regards to system assessment as we discussed here tonight, Jake added that in addition to safety, he would also like us to improve sightlines. He stated we should be looking for opportunities for safe locations to install more advanced mountain bike features on existing trails.
- **Tony Zammit**: Tony stated that he is in support of all projects present this evening. He reminded the group that he has thousands of dollars on the line for the December Commission meeting. Anything he can do to get the Rotary project in front of the Commission at the first Commission meeting in December, please let him know.
- Michelle Webster: Michelle voiced her support for working with the city to come up with an inventory protocol that the city feels is manageable and that could potentially be accomplished through volunteer help. Michelle in regards to the working group, Michele then asked for clarification on what the "City of Helena Community Development Department" is.

- Kristi stated that the City of Helena Community Development Department. They have representatives who chair the ADA Committee and work with community ADA access. We thought it would be beneficial if we had a representative from Community Development that could specifically help with that portion of evaluating the Davis project.
- **Brian Barnes**: Brian provided a comment regarding the ADA project at Mount Helena. He strongly encourages the City Commission to help us find matching funds (if needed) to ensure this project goes through. This is an important project for our entire community and we need to make sure we get more ADA compliant trails in our system.
- **Tony Jewitt**: Tony requested that the Parks Department implement the Directional Trail mitigation measures that the Helena Hikes group presented to the City of Helena Commission at their 11.14.2018 Administrative Meeting.

## **Housekeeping – Eric Sivers**

- While the October minutes were approved, HOLMAC still needs to approve the September 2020 minutes.
- Jennifer will add approval of the September 2020 and November 2020 minutes on the December agenda.

# **Next Steps for the Open Lands Major Project**

- Motion to provide guidance to city staff.
- Brian reiterated his comments from before.
- Eric stated that while the issues with the Directional Trail have been stated, he thinks that HOLMAC should put their support behind the major projects presented by the city including and especially, the ADA Trail which needs to have that Commission approval before the end of the year so they can continue to hold on to that funding.
- Eric made a motion that HOLMAC supports the major projects as presented to us by the city tonight with the addition of also looking into some mitigation discussions regarding Eddye McClure West as part of the return trail discussion. We highly encourage the City Commission to move forward on all of the items presented, especially the ADA Trail. Karen and T.J. seconded the motion. All agreed. Motion carried.

#### Other

• Claudia: We have had quite a bit of discussion on having a pilot project to move forward on a trails assessment project. Can we give direction to the city department to move forward on this item. Eric stated we can include this as an agenda item once the major projects move forward.

## **Future Agenda Items**

- Approval of the September 2020 and November 2020 minutes
- Pilot Project: Trails Assessment Project

## **Adjournment**

With no further business, Karen moved to adjourn the November 19, 2020 HOLMAC Meeting. Brian seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:53 pm.

## **ADA NOTICE**

The City of Helena is committed to providing access to persons with disabilities for its meetings, in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Montana Human Rights Act. The City will not exclude persons with disabilities from participation at its meetings or otherwise deny them the City's services, programs, or activities.

Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations to participate in the city's meetings, services, programs, or activities should contact Sharon Haugen, Community Development Director, as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to arrange for the requested accommodation, at any of the following: Phone: (406) 447- 8490; TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711 Email: <a href="mailto:citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov">citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov</a>, Mailing address & physical location: 316 North Park, Avenue, Room 445, Helena, MT 59623.