

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
June 1, 2010

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Winters presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:45 p.m.

ROLL CALL: City Commissioners present: Michael J. Winters, Robert Jones, Bill Bronson, Mary Jolley and Fred Burow. Also present were the City Manager, City Attorney, Directors of Park and Recreation, Library, and Planning and Community Development, Assistant Director of Fiscal Services, the Executive Director of the Housing Authority, Police Chief, City Engineer, Fire Marshal and the Administrative Secretary.

1. DOWNTOWN SAFETY AND SECURITY

Alison Fried, owner of Dragonfly Dry Goods, 504 Central Avenue, for approximately eight years; downtown business owner for approximately 15 years; served on Downtown Great Falls Association Board (represents downtown business owners) for six years; and currently serving on the Business Improvement District (BID) board (represents downtown property owners) spoke on behalf of many business and property owners, consumers and the BID board.

Ms. Fried asked the Commission to help find a solution to the loss of the downtown police officer. She added the BID board would like to offer an office/workplace/bike storage for an officer that is centrally located downtown.

City Manager Greg Doyon explained the intent was not to discontinue to program; that officer was pulled to meet staff shortages because of military deployments. He stated he believed Weed and Seed was working to find initial funding and there was an effort to consider a model similar to Billings where there is a funding partnership with the downtown association. Mr. Doyon commented that would take a commitment on behalf of the downtown business owners.

If a funding partnership isn't possible, Mr. Doyon stated he would report to the Commission some of the stats that involve the downtown officer, the current staffing impact to accommodate that request and upcoming budget consideration. If the Commission decides to prioritize a downtown officer after upcoming budget meetings, Mr. Doyon explained he will prepare a plan.

Ms. Fried noted there is an immediate problem because of the nice weather. She reported having to tell a gentleman to stop asking people for money; he walked away, but he was 250 lbs. She added a satellite radio was ripped off the roof of her store five days ago; she had a shoplifter three weeks ago who had a syringe of meth in her shirt; she also had a shoplifter six months ago that physically attacked her.

Mayor Winters questioned how many hours a day and what timeframe would be needed to have the presence of a police officer downtown. Ms. Fried reported the former officer was downtown during the day three weeks and during the night one week.

Commissioner Bronson commented it would be helpful for the Commission to receive an inventory of incidents from members of the BID and nearby residential owners. He noted Missoula is experimenting with an aggressive panhandling ordinance. An enhanced presence of officers downtown may be needed in late spring and summer. There may be a need for a multi-faceted solution.

Ms. Fried reported that business was twice the normal over a recent weekend because of out-of-town visitors. If visitors don't feel welcome because of a visible presence, the City doesn't look good. She requested an immediate solution, though there are other long-term solutions.

Mr. Doyon asked Police Chief Corky Grove where he would get a downtown officer now and how his current operations would be impacted. Chief Grove stated an officer would be reassigned from patrol, leaving his department short another officer. The Police Department is currently down six officers because four officers are in training and two are at the academy.

Mr. Doyon asked the Police Chief for recommendations to the downtown safety concerns. Chief Grove explained that when the downtown officer position was eliminated, several other positions were also eliminated because the emphasis was to build up patrol. Four of those positions will be brought back through grants. At that time, Chief Grove stated he planned to work some of those officers part time in the downtown area. Chief Grove noted that School Resource Officers have been mentioned. He explained three quarters of their salaries are paid by school administration. In the summer, those officers take vacations and military leave, and they are assigned to juvenile crimes since they are most familiar with the juveniles in the area.

Commissioner Jones thanked Ms. Fried for speaking candidly to the Commission and assured her the Commission would work with the City Manager to resolve the issue. He added the Commission has an obligation to protect the downtown area because there is a lot of emphasis, money and support placed there. The Commission will have to prioritize what is important to the community.

Mr. Doyon asked Ms. Fried if there is financial support from property owners. Ms. Fried responded some property owners do not feel they should have to contribute, but she agreed a financial obligation will be needed to solve the problem. Mr. Doyon stated a proposal will be presented to the Commission after staffing is considered and numbers are crunched.

2. GREAT FALLS AGRI-TECH PARK FINANCING UPDATE

Brett Doney, President, Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA), presented a PowerPoint presentation on the AgriTech Park. Mr. Doney made a formal request on behalf of the Board of Directors of GFDA for City support for the project. He explained the need for the Park because of the slow growth of the Great Falls economy; the high dependence on the United States Air Force; the demand for jobs; the low average wage in Great Falls; lack of ready-to-build, rail-served, heavy industrial sites; cost of running infrastructure in many different directions; and new revenue to maintain public services.

Mr. Doney reported goals for the project are to grow the Great Falls economy, diversity the primary sector, retain and create jobs including higher wage career opportunities, build a sustainable industrial property tax base, and make Great Falls more competitive in attracting private sector investment by always having one to two lots ready to build.

Mr. Doney explained there has been an effort to limit City risk on the project. He reported in-depth market research has been done to build on the City's demonstrated strengths, agri-processing being the primary target. Mr. Doney reported that, rather than purchasing the land in advance, they have negotiated with the Loy Trust (the family that donated land for the soccer complex and the Loy School) a rolling ten-year option with a ten-year renewal. He added plans are to construct the Park in small phases, with a small City share of upfront investment. Mr. Doney noted there will be more reliance on tax increment financing (TIF) than preferred until the Park becomes more developed.

Mr. Doney reported there are four requests for City support. The most important request is signing water, sewer and fire service agreements; all services would be paid by Park tenants; and, the tenants would waive right of protest for future annexation. The second request is that the City assume responsibility for upgrades to the existing City road (a portion of Eighteenth Avenue North). The third request is a \$140,000 infrastructure investment (about 6% of projected Phase 1 budget of \$2.5 million). The fourth request is an inter-municipal agreement with Cascade County to allow for a TIF district.

Mr. Doney explained most of these parks are built by a public authority or a city or county. He added this unique public/private partnership will facilitate attracting private investment in the City. Plans are to begin construction in the spring of 2011. The agri-processing industry has recovered; profits are up and expansion is underway.

Mr. Doyon commented the Commission should consider the value of agricultural land is not quite the same as heavy-industrial land, meaning the TIF agreement with the County would probably last for a long period of time. Mr. Doney stated lots would be annexed soon after construction, with reliance on TIF to build future phases of the Park. He added there is always a couple year delay before tax payments are received. To begin, 80% of property taxes would go to TIF and as capital investment from private businesses increases, that percentage can be reduced. Mr. Doyon asked if that arrangement will be acceptable to the State under the TIF law. Mr. Doney responded the standard in the State is to TIF 100%, but a smaller percentage can be approved by elected bodies.

Mr. Doyon reported water, sewer and fire service agreements can be drafted for Commission consideration at the next meeting.

Commissioner Burow asked about rail line ownership. Mr. Doney responded the rail will eventually be turned over to the Park tenants as a business association.

3. PEOPLE'S PARK AND RECREATION FOUNDATION FUNDRAISING EFFORTS UPDATE

Director of Park and Recreation Marty Basta reported Great Falls Park and Recreation Foundation was originally established in 1983 and re-established in 1991 as the Foundation for Parks, Recreation and Trails, though it has not been active for several years. Mr. Basta explained that he talked with the Park and Recreation Advisory Board about reactivating a park foundation, and that led to the creation of the People's Park and Recreation Foundation. He noted that many members are leaders in the community dedicated to raising funds for park and recreation improvements. Brian Thies is the President of the Foundation, Greg Hall Vice President, Keith Teske Secretary and Chad Simonson Treasurer. Other Board members are Kristine Voorhees, Phyllis Hemstad, Gordon Johnson, Wyman Taylor and Dave Krebs.

Mr. Thies distributed a booklet on the People's Park and Recreation Foundation and read the mission statement. He explained the Foundation is a nonprofit organization that has raised about \$40,000 for various projects in the City since September 2008. The long-term goal would be to establish a permanent endowment fund that would be able to fund projects to match or in line with the goals and needs of the City.

Mr. Thies reported the Foundation has raised money for playground equipment for Neighborhood Council local parks. He added they funded the fireworks display last year with the help of Bennett Motors, and the money has been raised for the display this year. The Paris Gibson Month Celebration Committee recently requested assistance from the Foundation. Mr. Thies noted the Foundation is also working on replacing trees that have been lost in the City.

When asked why he became involved with the Park and Recreation Board and Foundation, Mr. Thies responded though he didn't grow up in Great Falls, he remembered going to Gibson Park, the duck pond and Giant Springs when visiting his grandma. He noted Great Falls has a legacy that is very important to maintain.

Mr. Thies reported the Foundation meets at noon on the third Thursday of each month in the Park and Recreation conference room. The public is invited to attend and donations are welcome. Mr. Thies referenced the 2009 Annual Report and 2010 Year-to-Date Report for the Foundation.

Mr. Thies stated Greg Hall was instrumental in helping the Foundation assist one of the Neighborhood Councils raise funds for the Gibson Park lighting project – both matching funds and long-term maintenance needs. Mr. Hall noted cooperation and collaboration with the Park and Recreation Department; Mr. Basta wrote and has secured a sizeable CTEP grant. Mr. Hall explained the Foundation is trying to raise funds for projects where there is a shortfall. He noted citizens can earmark donations for specific projects to enhance the value of the City. Mr. Hall commented the Gibson Park Trail Lighting is an ongoing two-year project funded primarily by private citizens that should begin in the fall.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the work session of June 1, 2010, at 6:45 p.m.