

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**September 7, 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, and Mary Jolley. Commissioner Burow was excused. Also present were the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Directors of Public Works, Park and Recreation, Fiscal Services, Library, and Planning and Community Development, the Executive Director of the Housing Authority, Police Chief, Fire Chief and the Administrative Secretary.

**1. SAFER GRANT**

Fire Chief Randy McCamley provided a PowerPoint presentation for a SAFER grant application. He reported the SAFER grant application was opened on August 17, 2010 and will close September 17, 2010. Chief McCamley requested authorization to submit a grant application to hire eight additional front line firefighters. Adding eight additional firefighters will greatly improve the safety and operational effectiveness of fire ground activities and will help Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) move closer to the nationally recognized minimum fire ground staffing levels established by the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA)

Chief McCamley reported current first alarm staffing is ten firefighters. Eight new firefighters would provide two additional firefighters on each shift for up to twelve firefighters on a first alarm. NFPA 1710, the recognized industry standard for first alarm staffing, recommends fourteen.

Chief McCamley explained the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant application process. After authorization is given to submit the grant, DHS reviews and awards to the recipients that merit the grant. Departments that receive the grant are given a 90-day recruitment period, followed by a 24-month period of performance.

Chief McCamley explained DHS gives the highest consideration to departments to rehire laid off firefighters. The second level priority is given to retain firefighters who may face layoffs in the future. The third level priority is given for filling positions vacated through attrition but not filled due to economic circumstances. The fourth priority (the level GFFR falls under) is for hiring new firefighters.

Chief McCamley reported the need for additional front line firefighters has been discussed for many years. Increased demands for service and expanding geographic boundaries indicate staffing levels need to increase. Increased fire loss ratio and longer response times are outcomes of a lack of adequate staffing. Chief McCamley noted the City declined a SAFER grant in 2009 to add sixteen additional front line firefighters due to the downturn in the economy and the failure of a public safety mill levy.

The proposal to add eight front line firefighters would add two additional firefighters per shift to GFFR's four shift or four platoon system. Chief McCamley noted Tower Ten (the new aerial platform) will not be staffed full time at the present time; firefighters will be assigned to an engine company but will have Tower Ten available. When a station responds to an alarm, a decision will have to be made to take either a pumper truck or Tower Ten. Two extra personnel could be assigned to Tower Ten so firefighters don't have to move their equipment between trucks.

Chief McCamley explained the DHS program is a three-year program with no City match and no federal cap for the first two years. However, the City would commit to retaining staffing levels for year three. SAFER grant rules have changed from a five-year to a three-year program. Under the five-year program, there was a decreasing match and a cap on salaries.

If the City is awarded the SAFER grant, there would be increased public safety and safety for firefighters at no additional cost for 24 months; improved ability to reduce civilian injuries, death, and property loss due to fire; and, help with planning future growth, geographically and service delivery. Chief McCamley noted future fire station locations must be considered when planning future growth, and building additional staff will help staff those fire stations in the next few years.

Chief McCamley reviewed a slide of the total cost for three years. He explained the benefit includes health insurance, retirement, unemployment, worker's compensation, etc. DHS pays the cost the first two years, and the City pays the cost the third year. He reviewed startup costs that include personal protective equipment. Firefighters are custom fit for their own bunker gear. Some of those expenses would come out of the current operating budget. DHS only pays for wages and benefits.

Chief McCamley explained no risk is involved to apply for the grant; the risk begins if the City accepts the grant and commits to funding in the third year. DHS may accept an application for waiver based on financial hardship. If the waiver isn't granted and staffing is reduced, all monies received the first two years would have to be paid back.

In conclusion, Chief McCamley reported that since 2009, the emergency response needs of the community have not diminished. In fact, demand for service has increased and that trend is expected to continue.

Commissioner Jones asked if there are any expectations of attrition in the next few years. Chief McCamley responded he has not heard that anyone is planning to retire. However, approximately 25% of GFFR is eligible to retire.

Commissioner Jones asked if any consideration had been given to hire four additional front line firefighters rather than eight. Chief McCamley responded that if the Commission decides the City can only afford four firefighters, the grant application can be submitted for four firefighters. He noted that changes could not be made in the second or third year. Chief McCamley cautioned that it will take much longer to reach the minimum standards established by NFPA.

Mayor Winters asked where the City would come up with \$508,560 in the third year. Chief McCamley responded the Commission would have to prioritize that funding in the general fund.

City Manager Greg Doyon commented that because many programs are subsidized, there is little flexibility in the budget to consider this kind of opportunity. Mr. Doyon noted the question is whether the City can provide additional staffing. He asked the Commission to consider if the current GFFR staffing is safe for the department and the community and if it is meeting current needs. If additional staffing is needed, a plan that includes a levy should be laid out.

Commissioner Bronson commented that staffing issues have been addressed by changing the size of the platoons. He asked if that is a solution as opposed to hiring new personnel.

Chief McCamley responded NFPA is a consensus standard made up of fire service experts. He stated his job is to provide information on the issues and the capabilities of the department. He noted he has seen a trend of longer response times (which equates to more dangerous situations for the firefighters and citizens, and larger property losses).

Chief McCamley explained the reason for advocating for the grant is because it will fund nearly \$1 million for staffing for two years. He commented that he isn't aware of a grant that would pay for changing firefighter shifts. Increasing staff hours will be subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act, and overtime costs will be involved. He reported there were more firefighters on the streets in 1970 responding to approximately 900 calls per years, verses approximately 6,000 calls in 2010.

Mayor Winters asked about the comparison of firefighters in Great Falls with other communities of similar size. Chief McCamley responded Missoula works the same 10-14 shift; Missoula has 81 front line firefighters; Great Falls has 60.

Commissioner Bronson expressed concern that reasonable staffing expectations and needs, that ultimately benefit the public, are not being supported.

Commissioner Jones stated he doesn't want GFFR to be accepted for a SAFER grant and have to turn it down again because they may not get a third opportunity. He believes the discussion needs to be concerning the ability to pay. He supports applying for four firefighters rather than eight because that reduces the third year cost to half of the approximate \$500,000 that would be needed for eight additional firefighters. He noted the Police Department grant is coming due and that expense hasn't been addressed. Mr. Jones agreed that the number of public service responders is not adequate.

Mr. Doyon asked the timeframe for notice of award after applying for the grant. Chief McCamley responded it takes months to receive notification. Mr. Doyon also questioned the timeframe to accept the grant. Chief McCamley explained the previous grant was accepted and was only rejected when the levy failed.

Mayor Winters questioned if staff manning rescue vehicles would be in danger should a disaster

such as a severe earthquake occur. Chief McCamley responded that in his opinion and that of the NFPA that is correct. The number of fire ground injuries and firefighter injuries is directly attributed to overwork, exhaustion, and not being able to replace crews. President of the Great Falls Firefighters Union David Van Son commented that safety of the firefighters is the number one priority. NFPA standards are a minimum of four firefighters on the engine company; GFFR runs with three. There is also a NFPA standard of two in, two out. When responding with three people, the engine company must wait six or eight minutes for the second engine company before making entry. GFFR Captain Jeremy Jones commented that he has ten to twelve calls every month that he must explain why the response time has been over eight minutes to arrive on scene.

The consensus of the Commission was to submit a SAFER grant application for eight additional front line firefighters.

## **2. MONTANA EGGS, LLC**

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that through Mayor Winters, Montana Eggs, LLC, contacted the City regarding the possibility of extending their structure to the intersection of Northwest Bypass and Stuckey Road to allow for expansion of production. In order to expand operations, however, Montana Eggs, LLC will need City water and sewer. The total cost to the City, including the main extension for water and sewer to accommodate future growth, would be about \$211,000. Montana Eggs, LLC has indicated they would waive annexation as part of the development agreement with the City. The site at the intersection has development potential, and there has been some interest expressed to connect with City water and sewer at a future date. Montana Eggs, LLC has a business model and wants to stay in Great Falls and at that location. Mr. Doyon requested Commission approval to proceed with a development agreement for later consideration by the Commission.

Montana Eggs, LLC Project Consultant Todd Hanson introduced Montana Eggs, LLC board members John Wipf, New Rockford Colony, Choteau; Mike Kleinsasser, Kingsbury Colony, Valier; and Dave Hofer, Twin Hills Colony, Carter. Mr. Hanson reported Montana Eggs, LLC is a member-owned producer group that has been in existence in Great Falls since 1997.

Mr. Hanson reported that Montana Eggs, LLC, as a member grower cooperative, is in the business of providing eggs to numerous customers in the region. On an annual basis, Montana Eggs, LLC supplies about 5 million dozen eggs to accounts in and around the area of the City of Great Falls, including surrounding communities. For the last thirteen years, the facility at Stuckey Road has been principally a warehouse facility whereby the member producer growers from the colonies bring their eggs to be sorted, crated, and re-distributed to the retail wholesale accounts.

Mr. Hanson reported Montana Eggs, LLC board members have looked towards an expansion project over the last couple years. He referenced a handout of background material received by City Commissioners. Mr. Hanson stated Montana Eggs, LLC is proposing an expansion of the existing facility that would allow the addition of a new facility management and marketing team, Wilcox Family Farms headquartered in Roy, Washington. Wilcox Family Farms has been a

partner of Montana Eggs, LLC in the distribution and grading of eggs for several years. The new expansion will involve adding about \$1.5 million worth of grading and processing equipment for the emerging consumer consciousness about where our food comes from. The new facility with the improved equipment would allow the member producers growers to bring the egg production to the facility where it would be prepared, graded, packaged, and re-distributed through current marketing channels established by Wilcox Family Farms in Montana, Idaho, and eastern Washington. He added the expansion would also include improvements to the existing facility to make it appropriate for the processing and grading of eggs.

Mr. Hanson explained that with the expansion of the facility and new equipment, water and sewer services from the City would make the processing and grading of eggs more efficient, more economical, and more profitable for the member growers. He reported Montana Eggs, LLC is in favor of annexation of the property into the City to allow access to services and to move the project forward.

Mr. Hanson reported the project would increase 10 full-time jobs and 4-5 part-time jobs initially and retain approximately 52 jobs at the colonies. It is to the benefit of Montana Eggs, LLC to move its production to a centralized grading and USDA inspected facility to insure consumer confidence in the product being produced. He reported estimates of goods and services purchased directly in the City of Great Falls by the 26 member producer colonies are \$20-\$25 million each year. Mr. Hanson noted the approximate \$2.5-\$3 million expansion project involves a timeframe for a startup with Wilcox Family Farms in late November or December.

Mayor Winters questioned if local people will be hired for the new jobs and the salary range. Mr. Hanson responded that local people will be hired with a \$28,000-\$34,000 salary, plus benefits.

Mr. Doyon reported City Engineer Dave Dobbs noted the utility extensions will open a large area to higher-valued development, and nearly all of the water main extension costs and most of the sewer main extension costs could be recovered when the adjoining properties are annexed. Also, the water main upsizing costs now cover the entire project. He added that current bids indicate 10-15% under estimates.

Commissioner Jolley questioned if Montana Eggs, LLC is paying the cost to extend City services to the facility. Mr. Hanson stated that is correct.

The consensus of the Commission was to move forward with a development agreement.

Board member John Wipf commented that many restaurants over the past year have requested a shielded egg and noted they may seek a different supplier if Montana Egg, LLC cannot provide that type of food safety.

## ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the work session of September 7, 2010, at 6:44 p.m.