

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
April 6, 2010

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Winters presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 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, City Engineer, Directors of Fiscal Services, Park and Recreation, and Planning and Community Development, the Executive Director of the Housing Authority, Interim Library Director, Police Chief, Fire Chief and the Administrative Secretary.

1. CDBG/HOME PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND 2010-2015 CONSOLIDATED PLAN

Housing Administrator, Chris Imhoff, gave a PowerPoint presentation on CDBG funding and the 2010-2015 Consolidated Plan, including the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) undertaken in the community over the last two and one-half years. Ms. Imhoff explained Great Falls is a CDBG entitlement city, and the City is called a participating jurisdiction for the HOME Program. The funding is based on a statutory formula which includes the population, the age of the housing, and the poverty level of the city. The City must provide a Consolidated Plan every five years.

Ms. Imhoff stated the heart of the Plan is the required needs assessment and planning activity provided by CHAS. In the first year, the City's application for use of funds accompanies the Consolidated Plan. For the next four years, an Annual Action Plan is submitted which includes projects relating to priorities of the Consolidated Plan. Ms. Imhoff submitted a list of priorities included in the 2010-2015 Consolidated Plan.

Ms. Imhoff reported that HOME funds must always be used to provide housing for lower income households. The primary objective of CDBG funding is to develop communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and economic opportunities for low to moderate income persons. She listed steps used to determine CDBG fund eligibility, and distributed lists of HUD Matrix Codes and National Objectives of the program.

Ms. Imhoff explained that the CHAS provides the HUD required community needs assessment, with the proper focus on housing affordability needs. She reviewed the origin of the CHAS in Great Falls, beginning in 2007. She explained four surveys that were completed by January, 2009. Fifteen focus groups met to determine the extent and character of the needs identified. The Great Falls/Cascade County Housing Planning Group adopted seven key, unmet housing needs and strategies as the Housing Plan 2010-2020.

Ms. Imhoff noted that the Consolidated Plan seriously considers the needs and strategies derived from the CHAS process, but also includes public facility, public service and economic development needs for the entire community.

Grants Assistant, Melanie Lattin, reported the Consolidated Plan is a crucial component for the City of Great Falls to receive CDBG and HOME grant funds (typically \$1.5 million each year). The Consolidated Plan, implemented in 1995 by HUD, combines the planning and application requirements for the funds. She explained the process includes community input to identify both the short-term and long-term housing and community development needs/strategies, primarily for low-income people. Within the five-year plan, an Annual Action Plan considers the funding for a particular year. The Consolidated Plan is also a management tool to provide required data to the Federal Government.

Ms. Lattin reviewed the requirements of the Consolidated Plan. She explained the Annual Action Plan includes funding recommendations from the Community Development Council (CDC), a ten-group community volunteer council that reviews applications for block grant funding, listens to presentations by agencies, visits potential project locations, and makes recommendations to the City Commission.

Ms. Lattin reported the 2010-2015 Consolidated Plan is currently in a 30-day comment period. A public hearing will be held April 20, 2010. The Plan will be brought before the City Commission for approval at the May 4th meeting. After approval, the plan will be submitted to HUD for their approval.

Ms. Lattin reported plans include having the CDC meet earlier in the allocation process to work on an annual needs assessment and recommend funding priorities for each category to the City Commission prior to applications being available.

She noted that the proposed Consolidated Plan is available on the City website, and the requirements of the Consolidated Plan are available online.

2. PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATE – CASCADE COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE

Because Sheriff Castle had to leave to make another appointment, Mayor Winters invited him to make his presentation at this time.

Sheriff Castle invited the City Commission, individually or as a group, to visit the Cascade County Detention Facility. He noted the facility plays a critical role in government.

He explained he hoped to clear up confusion and provide budget information. He reported that the Sheriff/Coroner’s Office costs \$3.5 million a year to operate. The Detention Facility costs \$6.5 million a year to operate. He reported that his office receives approximately \$3.5 million in taxes.

Mr. Castle explained that the current plan that has been adopted for Cascade County is creating a crisis for the City Police Department. Mr. Castle thanked Commissioner Jones for the partnership between the Sheriff’s office and the City Police Department during his years as Chief of Police. He added that the partnership has continued with Chief Grove.

Mr. Castle provided information showing the current plan to rent beds in the Detention Facility to other counties and other state inmates to generate revenue. The impact of that arrangement is detrimental to our community. He reported approximately 3,000 inmates have been brought into Cascade County through programs that include Pre-Release, Probation and Parole and the Detention Facility. Mr. Castle noted some offenders will re-offend within three years. When the offense occurs in Cascade County, the County pays the bill.

Mr. Castle explained that the Cascade County Detention Facility cannot continue to be funded by bringing out-of-county inmates to our community.

3. ANIMAL FOUNDATION UPDATE

Animal Foundation of Great Falls Trustee, John Gilbert, reported that, around 2007, the City of Great Falls hired Kim Staton, a nationally-known expert, to review the Animal Shelter. Ms. Staton commented that the existing building is not salvageable as an animal shelter and is in desperate need of replacement. She explained there is no effective way to separate incoming animals from those that are adoptable or those that are sick or exposed.

Medical Director for the Animal Shelter, Dr. Tim Gilligan, reported on health issues at the Shelter. He noted that dogs do much better than cats. There are fewer dogs and they are separated by concrete blocks. The Shelter receives large numbers of cats, mostly strays, and cats get respiratory viruses. The facilities are not adequate to house and prevent airborne diseases. The ventilation system is non-existent. Recommended air exchanges are 15-20 per hour; currently they may get a couple a day.

Dr. Gilligan reported that 50%-60% of all cats that come into the Shelter will come down with an upper respiratory infection that reduces their chances of being adopted. He noted that incoming animals must be quarantined for at least two weeks to determine if they have a disease and/or are able to recover from a disease. He added that a better isolation facility is needed to treat sick animals. Animals are currently being treated on desks and in the current isolation room that is also receiving incoming animals.

Commissioner Burow stated that better ventilation could be provided to improve conditions. Dr. Gilligan noted that people touch animals and carry diseases to other animals. Glass coverings over the kennels would be helpful.

Mr. Gilbert reviewed a brief history of the Animal Foundation. He explained that over \$1.5 million has been raised, and more than half of the donors have given \$100 or less over the last seven years. The Dog Park was constructed; however, he explained that the Dog Park is owned by the City. To date, \$195,000 has been spent on design costs. City staff has approved the design of the animal control portion of the Shelter, and the Design Review Board has approved the plans.

Mr. Gilbert explained the difference between a 'shelter' and a 'pound.' People like to go to a shelter; a shelter provides education, trains dogs, grooms and spays/neuters animals; and a shelter attracts donations and volunteers.

Mr. Gilbert reviewed the advantages to co-locating adoption and animal control facilities. He emphasized the Animal Foundation has no interest in doing animal control, nor operating the current “shelter.”

If the current “shelter” is to be replaced rather than renovated, Mr. Gilbert explained the choices include the City building their own animal control-only facility or continue to work with the Animal Foundation on a joint facility. The Animal Foundation requests the City contribute what would be spent to construct their own facility through a lease arrangement and shared operating costs.

Architect, Steve L’Heureux, distributed a project cost estimate and 30-Year Life Cycle Cost Break Down pie chart. He explained that co-location of the “shelter” and “animal control” would result in significant savings in construction and staff. Mr. L’Heureux noted that staffing, operations, maintenance, etc. represent the major long-term expenses.

Mr. L’Heureux showed a drawing of the current building plans, including the adoption and animal control facility. Currently, a suggestion is to build the shell of the building and only finish the animal control portion. The City’s investment, along with a contribution from the Animal Foundation, would be used for this phase. The Animal Foundation would be responsible for completing the rest of the building. Mr. L’Heureux noted that the initial cost estimate was discussed seven or eight years ago, and costs will increase proportionately in the next three to five years.

Commissioner Burow expressed concern about involving the City in another public/private venture. Commissioner Bronson noted that this project should stand alone for consideration. He questioned what expectations of the City would be involved in operating costs. Mr. Gilbert explained that the Animal Foundation is willing to enter into any reasonable agreement with the City.

Mr. L’Heureux noted that the proposed air handling/changing system is like those required for surgery. The materials used in the kennel area must be able to be power-washed; however, those materials are expensive, but a good, long-lasting investment.

City Manager, Greg Doyon, explained that any questions can be directed to the Animal Foundation and/or himself. He explained that the proposed project will be added to the next Agenda Meeting to determine further direction.

Commissioner Jones thanked the representatives of CDBG and the Animal Foundation for their presentation to the new commission.

John Huber, President of the Animal Foundation, asked the City Commission when they would build a new animal shelter if the City’s does not partner with the Animal Foundation. Commissioner Jones stated the City Commission cannot answer that question. He assured Mr. Huber they would consider the proposal.

ADJOURN

Because Mayor Winters left to attend another meeting, and there being no further discussion, Mayor Pro Tempore, Bill Bronson, adjourned the work session of April 6, 2010, at 6:50 p.m.