

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
March 16, 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 Fiscal Services, Planning and Community Development, Public Works, Executive Director of the Housing Authority, Police Chief, Fire Marshall and the Administrative Secretary.

1. SOUTH ARTERIAL ALIGNMENT STUDY

Director of Planning and Community Development, Mike Haynes, introduced Andrew Finch, Senior Transportation Planner. Mr. Finch presented a PowerPoint presentation on the background and the alignment study for the Great Falls South Arterial. He explained that, in addition to being the Transportation Planner for the City of Great Falls, he is also the Transportation Planner for the Great Falls Transportation Planning Process. He noted he works for the Metropolitan Planning Organization, which provides the framework and staff for the transportation planning process for the City of Great Falls, including the urbanized areas surrounding the City.

Mr. Finch explained the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) is the decision-making body for the Transportation Planning Process, and Mayor Winters serves as the City's representative on that board. Other members of the PCC represent the County, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Great Falls Transit District. In addition, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) includes staff-level members who are involved in transportation development and serve as an advisory body.

Mr. Finch explained that the South Arterial project has been in plans since the late 1960's when Great Falls was undergoing a great period of growth, when it was anticipated that Great Falls would have a population of 100,000 by 1980. In the 1980's the Anaconda Smelter closed and Malmstrom Air Force Base was doing cutbacks. Federal monies for the South Arterial were declined at that time because the community felt they could not commit to the financial commitments and timeframe attached to those funds.

Mr. Finch reported there was renewed interest in the 1990's for the South Arterial, assuming it will be needed as growth occurs and that it will help facilitate expansion and economic development. A Development Strategy was formulated that included a feasibility study completed in 2004. The current phase is the route location study and environmental review process, and a few more steps are needed to complete the Development Strategy.

Mr. Finch reported the feasibility study included possible impacts and benefits of an arterial to determine the feasibility of proceeding with the project. Benefits included reducing congestion

on Tenth Avenue South, facilitating an international trade corridor and providing an additional crossing for emergency access to the medical corridor. The study recommended proceeding with a southern arterial rather than a northern arterial after considering needs, benefits and costs.

He reported the primary purposes of the Alignment Study were to confirm the goals and objectives and develop a purpose and need statement for the South Arterial; reduce the multiple possible alignments to a single or select number to move to the next stage in the process; identify sections with independent utility along the selected alignment (determine a segment which will function independently and help the community); and identify the footprint of the alignment, before moving to the environmental stage.

Mr. Finch explained that sophisticated route modeling software was used to select alignments for consideration. Representatives for the County, City, MDT and the FHWA helped guide the process, and public meetings were held. He reviewed the Purpose and Need Statement, and highlighted the study area. He noted that cemeteries were avoided in the proposed alignments, as well as the Portage National Historic Landmark District and wetlands, if possible.

Commissioner Burow questioned a narrow section of river as a possible option. Mr. Finch explained that costs were assigned to existing developed lots. Six possible alignments were selected for further analysis, and after route comparison for impacts and benefits, the recommended phased alignment was selected. That alignment could proceed to the environmental process.

Mr. Finch noted the Study proposed the recommended Red Alignment be designed as a four-lane because of the amount of traffic anticipated (10,000 vehicles/day), with limited access control and at-grade intersections. The Study also recommends a phased approach because of the high estimated costs.

Mr. Finch explained that the conclusions in the Alignment Study and moving to the next stage in the process, as recommended by the Planning Board, will be considered by the Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting later in the evening. He noted that the next stage would be an environmental study and a financial plan. A reasonable financial plan is necessary to proceed with an environmental study.

Mr. Finch reviewed concerns of the project including the cost, impact to property owners, a future land-use plan surrounding the arterial and the National Historic District Portage route. He explained that impact upon the Portage route would need mitigation. City Manager, Greg Doyon, asked for examples of mitigation. Mr. Finch explained that visitor interaction with the landmark district could be enhanced by setting aside scenic overlooks, preserving open space, etc. He also noted that roads leading to the Arterial need improvement, whether or not the South Arterial is built.

Commissioner Jolley asked if the State may give up maintenance of Tenth Avenue South if the Arterial is built. Mr. Finch agreed that is a possibility.

Commissioner Jolley questioned who must concur before proceeding to the next stage, local

decision-makers or the Coordinating Committee. Mr. Finch explained that the PCC is comprised of representatives of local decision-makers.

Commissioner Jolley commented that Mr. Finch hadn't mentioned the recent vote by the County Commission to not concur. Mr. Finch agreed, but noted it is included in the staff report. Commissioner Burow asked what effect that decision would have. Mr. Finch explained that the PCC will dictate the future of this Arterial, and it is comprised of representatives that include one member from the County Commission. He explained that the project is before the City Commission so a policy decision can be made to give direction to the PCC City representative.

Mayor Winters noted that the proposed route would affect some high-value homes. Mr. Finch reported that the cost of homes will not be given any weight through the next phase of the process. Impact to people, regardless of the value of a home, will be considered in the environmental process.

Commissioner Burow questioned if a financial commitment is needed at this time. Mr. Finch explained that will need to be discussed locally (City, County, etc.) before the environmental process can be completed. However, \$4.3 million is available to proceed through environmental assessment and into design, if needed.

Commissioner Bronson commented that a "no-build" option must be considered when going through the environmental assessment phase. Mr. Finch agreed.

Commissioner Burow questioned if all routes will still be considered during the environmental assessment process. Mr. Finch noted that, if PCC approves proceeding to the environmental phase with just the Red Alignment, they could recommend proceeding with more than one route.

Mayor Winters asked what is being asked of the Commission at this time. Mr. Finch explained the Commission is being asked to agree that the Red Alignment is the best route to proceed. Commissioner Bronson noted the Commission could also suggest another alignment. Mr. Finch agreed and added the Commission could suggest moving forward with the design characteristics without any specific alignment.

Commissioner Burow asked how the proposed route may affect the River Road infrastructure recently installed. Mr. Finch explained the Red Alignment will impact the lower houses in a new subdivision.

Commissioner Jolley inquired who has the power of eminent domain. Mr. Finch explained that all government has eminent domain powers, and the logical entity in this case would be the MDT. However, they have been pushing for local acquisition of the rights-of-way ahead of time.

2. CDBG RECOMMENDATIONS & HOME PROGRAM

Director of Planning and Community Development, Mike Haynes, reported that the Community Development Council (CDC) has been meeting over recent weeks to prioritize the funding for CDBG and the HOME Program for 2010/2011. He explained the recommendations are on the

Consent Agenda for the City Commission meeting later in the evening, but he hoped to save time by briefing the Commission at this time.

Chris Imhoff, Housing Administrator, introduced Susan McCord, Sandie Wright and Bob Rudeseal representing CDC. She explained the current year's allocation period was November 16, 2009 – January 22, 2010. She reported the application was available on the web site and by request. Notice of grant funding availability was emailed to over 100 agencies/organizations, and ads were placed in the newspaper and announcements made on radio.

Ms. Imhoff reported 19 applicants attended a grant workshop held on December 3, 2009. Twenty-nine CDBG applications and two HOME fund applications were received and reviewed by staff to determine eligibility, and CDC scored the applications and made on-site visits. She explained that since public facility applications greatly outnumbered funding availability, more than \$90,000 of unprogrammed CDBG funds were added to this year's public facility funding. She noted those funds were unused public facility grant awards from the previous year.

Ms. Imhoff reported recommendations for the HOME Program include \$350,000 for Accessible Space, Inc. (ASI) to build a 30-unit senior housing complex. She noted ASI has a great reputation nationally for Section 202 HUD and Section 811 HUD building complexes. Currently they have 11 projects in Montana and 123 across the nation. HUD will fund \$4 million of the \$4.4 million project, and yearly subsidies for low-income seniors will last for 40 years. Additionally, Ms. Imhoff reported recommendations for Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc. are \$111,000.

Susan McCord thanked the Commission for considering the recommendations. She reported funding for grant requests this year was short \$741,000. She explained that great effort was made to direct the funding where it could be best used for the grantees.

Commissioner Burow questioned how a builder was selected to build the retirement facility. Ms. Imhoff explained that Accessible Space, Inc. has submitted grant applications to HUD (Denver) and the City. When approved, the proposed project will comply with the formal bidding process.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the work session of March 16, 2010, at 6:38 p.m.