

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
March 2, 2010

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Winters presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:31 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, Assistant Fire Chief and the Administrative Secretary.

City Manager Greg Doyon explained that he would defer the budget discussion until after the presentation on the tennis courts since the audience may be more interested in that topic.

1. GREAT FALLS TENNIS ASSOCIATION PROPOSAL

Marty Basta, Park and Recreation Director, distributed a copy of a June, 2005, staff report from the Park and Recreation Department to the City Commission outlining the status and condition of the 30 municipal tennis courts at 11 locations in Great Falls. He explained that the report also made recommendations to close certain neighborhood courts because of high repair costs and low usage. He noted that most of the City-owned tennis courts were built during the 1960's, and the City has been resurfacing one to two tennis courts per year for approximately 12 years. Mr. Basta explained that routine maintenance for the 50-year old tennis courts is no longer practical, and funding for major rehabilitation projects has not been available. Of the original 30 courts, 10 courts in four locations have either been closed or physically removed because of their unplayable condition, leaving 20 tennis courts in seven locations throughout the City. City staff has rated these remaining courts from poor to fair condition.

Mr. Basta reported that Dave Crum and Ben Rangel, representatives of the Great Falls Tennis Association, presented a public/private funding concept to improve 12 tennis courts in two locations to the City Commission during the October 20, 2009 Work Session. They subsequently requested a \$150,000 matching grant from the Park Trust Fund, which the Park Advisory Board recommended for approval at its January 11, 2010 meeting. Mr. Basta explained that he invited both Ben and Dave to share their public/private funding concept to the Commission for those who may not be familiar with the proposal.

Dave Crum reported that a working group of members of the Great Falls Tennis Association, school district administrators and high school coaches have been meeting for over one and one-half years to discuss the disrepair condition of the tennis courts. He emphasized that, if the Commission approves \$150,000 for improvement of the tennis courts, they make it contingent on a dollar for dollar match. He explained those dollars will fund resurfacing the eight CMR tennis courts and reconstructing the four Hurd Riverside Park courts. Mr. Crum noted that tennis courts are an asset that helps recruit people to the community. Also, he stated they believe \$1 million dollars annually could be brought into the Great Falls community by hosting tennis tournaments.

Ben Rangel presented a PowerPoint presentation on the future of tennis in Great Falls. He posed questions to consider and listed supporters working on the project. He explained that several tennis courts were built in the 1960's using Bureau of Outdoor Recreation funds, and there were numerous recreational tennis players. At one time there were 36 public courts at 12 sites, including Malmstrom Air Force Base, distributed throughout the community. Currently, there are fewer tennis players, limited youth and adult tennis programs, dilapidated courts, court closures/conversions and courts that are inefficiently spread throughout the community. Mr. Rangel stated the Great Falls Tennis Association feels tennis is at a critical state in Great Falls, and if current trends continue, there could be more public court closures, resulting in an exclusive "country club" state of tennis with a lack of courts for school tennis programs and use by the public.

Mr. Rangel showed slides of the various courts. North Kiwanis Park consists of two courts, overlaid in the summer of 2009. It is a safe and attractive facility, with a quality surface. Russell Park and Sunrise Park both consisted of two courts and in each case one court was converted to a basketball court. They were resurfaced approximately seven or eight years ago and are in fairly good shape, though some cracks are starting to form at both facilities. CMR courts (an eight-court facility near CMR High School) probably receive the greatest use. They were resurfaced a few years ago and are beginning to show cracks. The surface is beginning to peel away from the asphalt undercoating at West Kiwanis Park. Lions Park, a two-court facility, was resurfaced six to seven years ago and is also beginning to develop cracks. Montana Park, a four-court facility located behind the Heritage Inn, was resurfaced seven to eight years ago but is beginning to develop cracks four to five inches wide. Elk's Riverside Park, a four-court facility along the river, is unplayable and was locked up about a dozen years ago. The Jaycee Park facility has been essentially closed down and is no longer available for tennis play. The courts were removed from Verde Park and Kranz Park.

Mr. Rangel explained that tennis facilities have been reduced from 36 public courts at 12 sites to 16 playable courts at six sites—eight courts at CMR, two courts at each West Kiwanis, North Kiwanis and Lions parks, and one court at each Sunrise and Russell parks. However, current national trends show tennis is one of the fastest growing sports in the U.S., and is the only traditional sport experiencing increased participation (up 30% in the past seven years). He noted that 70% of all tennis is played on public courts. He also reported the health, social and economic benefits of tennis. He noted the trend is to develop community tennis "centers/hubs" instead of neighborhood courts, which tend to be isolated, more expensive to maintain, and receive limited use.

Mr. Rangel reported that tennis findings from a 2008 Park and Recreation survey indicate the tennis courts are not in good shape and hope something can be done. He stated the Great Falls Tennis Association has developed goals to enhance youth and adult recreation and physical fitness/wellness activities in the community, grow tennis in Great Falls, facilitate high school and USTA sanctioned tennis tournaments, and encourage public/private partnerships to reinvest in the public tennis facilities in the community. Mr. Rangel showed informational slides supporting

each goal. In addition to the City Park Board \$150,000 matching grant recommendation to the Commission to be provided from the Park Trust Fund to resurface eight CMR courts (\$50,000) and to reconstruct four Hurd (Riverside) courts (\$250,000), Mr. Rangel noted the Great Falls Tennis Association is interested in constructing four additional courts at the Hurd facility at an additional cost of \$250,000 to create a multi-site tennis venue. (A minimum of sixteen courts are needed to successfully host tennis tournaments.) He explained that these additional funds would be generated by the Great Falls Tennis Association from other local, state and national partners.

If the stated goals are accomplished, Mr. Rangel explained that the benefits to Great Falls would be enhanced community fitness opportunities, improved tennis facilities for school/public use, improved community asset and amenities, additional family-based activity, economic development via tournaments and established funding for long-term court maintenance. He noted that the Great Falls Tennis Association would make a commitment, with the Great Falls School District and the City of Great Falls, to annually budget maintenance funds to be used by the Park and Recreation Department for court maintenance.

Mr. Rangel explained plans are to complete fundraising efforts by early summer, with construction of the CMR court and reconstruction of the Hurd court by early fall of this year. Bidding would be done during the winter for tennis tournaments in the spring and summer next year. The goal to promote fitness/wellness activities and growing Great Falls tennis would begin soon and would be ongoing and continuous.

Commissioner Bronson questioned what type of material is now being used to surface/resurface courts. Mr. Rangel explained there are a variety of surfaces, however, serious consideration is being given to post-tension concrete for the reconstruction of the Hurd (Riverside) courts. That process involves putting down a monolithic slab that is tensioned with cables in all four directions. As the concrete is setting up, those cables are tensioned so the slab becomes whole. The slab will stay in one piece regardless of unstable soil conditions or moisture infiltration, and cracking will be reduced. Mr. Rangel noted that this type of slab can last for forty or fifty years, however, every five to eight years, a new surface would need to be put down. He added that the facilities are public facilities and City of Great Falls would remain the owner; the Park and Recreation Department would determine the facilities maintenance and improvements needs.

Commissioner Burow applauded the long-term maintenance planning included in the proposal. He questioned the availability of tennis courts in the Great Falls High School area. Mr. Rangel noted there are no facilities close to the school; however, plans include designating the Hurd (Riverside) courts as the home court facility for Great Falls High. Great Falls Transit provides bus service to nearby Gibson Park.

Mayor Winters asked if it would be necessary to sign up to use the courts. Mr. Rangel noted there may be need for a reservation system; however, he didn't think there would be major difficulty with the courts being available.

Commissioner Jolley commented that the Riverside facility is a beautiful place, especially in the summer with the wind coming off the river.

John Alexander (no address given) expressed appreciation to the City of Great Falls Park and Recreation Department for providing an opportunity for his early tennis training at the Hurd Courts in the early 1960's that contributed to a partial-ride scholarship to the University of Montana. He also expressed support for the current efforts of the Great Falls Tennis Association.

Mr. Doyon reported that Cheryl Crawley, Superintendent of Schools, called to convey full support on behalf of the Great Falls Public Schools. He explained that the Commission has to authorize the release of funds from the Trust Fund, if the grant is matched. If the Commission is in agreement at the Agenda Meeting, the Tennis Association Proposal will be added to the Agenda for approval by the Commission.

2. INITIAL COMMISSION BUDGET WORK SESSION WRAP UP

Mr. Doyon explained that the Commission has been presented with a broad overview of department operations and needs since February 16th, and noted this initial wrap-up of those meetings will give the Commission opportunity to start prioritizing and identifying needs for the City Manager to begin budget preparation. He asked Krista Artis, Fiscal Services Administrative Assistant, to list items identified by the Commission.

Mr. Doyon asked the Commission for general concerns, i.e., the economy, service demands in the community, etc. Mayor Winters prioritized essential services, defined as police, fire, park and recreation, water and sewer. Commissioner Burow commented he thinks recreation is a secondary service. He noted he will hold the line on taxes and cuts may be needed.

Mr. Doyon asked the Commission if all of their essential services were listed. Streets were added to the list. Mr. Doyon noted the street maintenance policy is to prioritize some of the worst roads throughout the City. The Commission agreed to continue the policy. Commissioner Jones added records software to the essential services list.

To hold the line at taxes, Mr. Doyon asked the Commission how far they were willing to go to make that happen. He explained that the amount that can be raised is capped under State law, and the most that can be raised in new taxes is \$125,000, as reported by Melissa Kinzler, Assistant Director Fiscal Services. Mr. Doyon noted that amount will have to come from somewhere in the Operating Budget to avoid raising new taxes. Commissioner Bronson explained that the amount would have miniscule affect on taxpayers, whether it is banked, used that year, or a combination. Commissioner Jones agreed that since a new tax wouldn't be applied, this taxing issue should continue. Commissioner Bronson passed out his budget ideas in written form to the Commission. Commissioner Jolley agreed that no new programs be added to the budget.

Mr. Doyon explained that if the \$125,000 that is allowed under taxation isn't used, most of that amount will be needed for operating expenses and contractual obligations to employees under union contracts, and significant service reductions would need to be made within the budget. Commissioner Jolley asked the amount of new property taxes that will be collected this year. Ms. Kinzler reported the average over the past five years is approximately \$300,000. She

explained there will be an additional \$700,000, if the \$125,000 is included.

Mr. Doyon asked the Commission for a dollar amount to use to construct the new budget. Commissioner Burow repeated his stand to hold the line on taxes. He noted that some employees and/or services will be lost, but believes the public wants costs to be held down. Commissioner Jones disagreed because of revenue projections. He noted that budgets have been difficult to maintain for the last four years. If the recession continues, revenue projections will be different next year. He explained it is important to catch up items that have been curtailed for several years such as fire/rescue boats and the records software for \$15,000. He applauded the departmental budget presentations, and explained the Commission has an obligation to consider good, affordable requests.

Mr. Doyon asked the Commission what area(s) of the budget should be held in line. Commissioner Jolley reported everything should be held with the exception of some items for Police, City Clerk and a few new firefighters. Commissioner Bronson added his proposal is to consider the NFPA 1710 standards and start with four new firefighters. He emphasized the need for strategic planning in the Fire Department, and most departments. The City is growing geographically and planning for an additional fire station should be considered. Also, the current police station is inadequate, and the Natatorium needs substantial repairs.

Commissioner Jones noted he has considered fire, police and staff safety, a water-craft rescue boat, the fire-prevention program, additional rescue training, four-wheel drives rather than sedans, the Natatorium, the Mansfield Center events, holding recreational fees down, a down-sized emergency power generation, community service officer and the animal shelter recommendations.

Mr. Doyon asked the Commission for clarification on areas of the budget they want reduced or frozen. Commissioner Jolley commented that Park and Recreation programs that don't fully support themselves should be considered. Commissioner Jones noted the Civic Center and Events Center operating costs should be reviewed and reduced.

Mr. Doyon explained that he will start budget reviews with departments in mid-April and present the outcome of those deliberations to the Commission May 5th.

Mayor Winters commented that each department should do an analysis of man-hour needs to reduce/shift personnel. Park and Recreation user fees should not be increased; a community's character is shown in its park system.

Commissioner Bronson expressed concern that the Commission does not have adequate time to consider fee increases. He requested that the Commission establish a policy that all departments consider needs in advance and present a timely recommendation to allow the Commission adequate time to make a decision. Mayor Winters agreed that policy should be put in place immediately.

Mr. Doyon asked the Commission for additional direction in areas that may need more resources. Commissioner Burow requested departments identify projects, personnel, etc. that can be cut

back or eliminated to increase efficiency. Commissioner Jones noted the cost-savings of combining Planning and Community Development departments, and asked that the additional code enforcement staff requested by Mike Haynes, Planning and Community Development Director, be considered. Commissioner Bronson also agreed with Mr. Haynes' request to meet the demands of uniform code enforcement.

Commissioner Jolley added careful consideration must be given to wage increases; State personnel haven't had wage increases in a couple years and may not see an increase for another two years. Commissioner Burow noted that government jobs are some of the best jobs in the state and the country for salaries and benefits. He explained that people who are making \$10 per hour are being asked to pay more taxes to pay someone who is making \$20 - \$25 per hour. When a contract is settled, it sets the standard for other negotiations.

Commissioner Jones requested a contingency fund of approximately \$100,000 be established to fund buyouts so staff can be immediately replaced.

Mayor Winters agreed that government jobs are very good jobs. He stated that all City employees, elected officers and everyone associated with the City must be reminded that they are the City's public relations person. All rudeness, shortness or less than desirable conduct on the part of an employee will not be tolerated by this Commission.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the work session of March 2, 2010, at 6:45 p.m.