

JOURNAL OF CITY COMMISSION WORK SESSION
Virtual Meeting by Zoom
September 21, 2021

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Kelly presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM

Due to the COVID-19 health concerns, the format of the City Commission Work Session was held in a virtual video-conferencing environment.

ROLL CALL/STAFF INTRODUCTIONS: City Commission members participated electronically via Zoom Webinar: Bob Kelly, Tracy Houck, Mary Sheehy Moe, Owen Robinson and Rick Tryon. City Staff participating electronically were: City Manager Greg Doyon and Deputy City Manager Chuck Anderson; City Attorney Sara Sexe and Deputy City Attorney Jeff Hindoen; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Finance Deputy Director Kirsten Myre and Finance Grant Administrator Tom Hazen; and Police Chief Jeff Newton. City Clerk Lisa Kunz was present in the Commission Chambers.

To honor the Right of Participation and the Right to Know (Article II, Sections 8 and 9 of the Montana Constitution), modifications have also been made for public participation.

To attend and participate in the virtual meeting utilizing Zoom, attendees must register in advance for the Commission Meeting at: : https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_F74tQCiQnehg7oBsgymLw

For all other participation options, please see **Public Participation Guide for City Commission Meetings**.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Participating via Zoom was:

Shyla Patera, North Central Independent Living Services (NCILS), commented that NCILS is happy about Big Sky Aim High breaking ground, and hopes that ARPA funds will go towards accessibility needs.

1. AMERICAN RESCUE ACT (ARPA) FUNDING.

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that this topic is a continuation of the prior work session. After the last meeting, the Commission was left with some thoughts on how to proceed. He anticipates several work sessions on this topic for the Commission to determine its priorities. He requested that the Commission review the draft Grant Application and provide feedback to Grant Administrator Tom Hazen for the document to be updated and made available to the public. Feedback pertaining to the five prioritized projects was received from some members of the Commission. Staff is also looking for feedback on any specific set-aside amounts between the City and community.

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Grant Administrator Tom Hazen reported that he is still waiting on resolution of HB 632 (Public Works Water and Infrastructure bill). Debate continues on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that may impact Commission deliberations.

Manager Doyon added that staff has been drafting lists that could potentially be funded. The lists have been refined when items were determined to be ineligible. If there is additional funding through an infrastructure bill, the potential is there to fund some of the projects that were removed from the lists or could be used to complement some of the things that are still on there.

Grant Administrator Hazen requested Commission feedback, suggestions and priorities to begin to finalize the Grant Application.

Mayor Kelly noted that his written responses to Grant Administrator Hazen were meant to start conversations amongst the Commissioners and to gather more feedback going forward. Grant Administrator Hazen did a good job explaining what was eligible, noting the overlapping categories and timelines. The Commission still needs to identify the goals and priorities that are highlighted in yellow.

In response to Grant Administrator Hazen's memo, Mayor Kelly noted:

- The minimal grant request amount can be decided
- Awards over \$50,000 require registration with SAM.gov
- The Commission needs to think about the timing of applications and the review process
- With regard to the review process for scoring, Mayor Kelly suggested the expertise of the CDBG standing group, remove any Commission members from that process, and have the suggestions be prioritized and funneled up based on the priorities the Commission established for CDBG

Mayor Kelly asked if the Commissioners had any other comments, in general, about the application. Hearing none, Mayor Kelly asked Commissioner Moe to give a review of the format that she went through to respond to Grant Administrator Hazen's questions.

Commissioner Moe commented that there is a real public interest in how these monies are distributed and being able to track and follow them. She suggested the best assurance the Commission can provide people is to make sure that it is a government entity that is bound by Montana's open meeting laws and the right to participate and observe.

She prioritized her responses to Grant Administrator Hazen both broad-based and specific. Her prioritized list included: Fire: All projects, city-wide, \$2,000,000; Public Works, Environmental, city-wide, \$4,270,000; Admin: IT & Mapping, both projects, city-wide, \$4,000,000; Events: All projects, city-wide, \$1,500,000; Parking Garages, staff requests + amenities, \$1,250,000; Admin: Communications, both projects, \$250,000; Commission Chamber/City Court upgrades, \$1,000,000.

Those priorities add up to about \$15,000,000 of the \$19,000,000 received. Although the City has considerable expertise among staff, there are certain entities that have a better sense of how to run particular kinds of grant programs that have a good track record in particular areas. She suggested a

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subcategory of groups that would include Great Falls Development Authority overseeing significant grant requests for economic development, United Way for non-profit requests that are on a prioritized basis, and NeighborWorks for housing. United Way is best equipped to deal with mental health care, homelessness, early childhood education and education itself.

If those entities are involved, Commissioner Moe suggested a Commission member have some oversight in the process. What she is hearing from people is that they want an elected official to hold accountable.

Mayor Kelly reiterated that feedback is to start a conversation to get everyone thinking about what makes or does not make sense. He does not think the Commission should establish certain hard number percentages for what amount goes to the community and what amount goes to the City. The things that are being done at the City level, whether it is IT work or work in the Convention Center, is directed towards benefitting the entire community. Things that the community is working on deals directly with tourism, economic development, mental health, housing, affordable housing, quality healthcare and quality childcare. Those were directives in the ARPA rules and regulations.

To aid the City in a variety of ways he termed his funding priorities as those of the City assets: Mansfield Theater seating replacement, improvements and ceiling repair; strategic communication plan survey; improved AV tools for cybersecurity; Fire Department deferred maintenance projects; Fire or Police Department programs with community partners for training in non-violent responses; and making the parking garages safe and user friendly. Most public works projects that were listed could be charged through the proprietary funds.

He agreed with allocating funds to Great Falls Development Authority to administer for the revolving loan fund; United Way to administer dollars designated for mental health, homelessness, graduation matters and all of their various projects; NeighborWorks for new homebuyer education, etcetera, that adds to the stable base of the community; Great Falls Tourism that works closely with the hotel associations and restaurants that have been affected greatly, and the airline industries to help with tourist recovery. Another priority is quality, affordable childcare. Family Promise and others are working to locate a building downtown to help provide affordable childcare for folks working downtown.

Mayor Kelly continued that he thinks other groups should not be disallowed from applying because there are plenty of people that do great work in the community to help the working families and their efforts to make a decent living in the community.

With regard to application review, Mayor Kelly suggested the current CDBG model be followed. He would like it done quarterly or semi-annually because the money needs to be earmarked by 2024 and expended by 2026.

Commissioner Houck expressed support of working with community partners to get the money out. She is in support of giving United Way a larger chunk of money to manage as they see fit because they go through a strategic process identifying community needs. She would also like to see a way to administer funds to assist landlords who have been the most impacted due to not receiving rent payments for months. She referred to the Park and Recreation study wherein the community identified a high use of recreation in the community and suggested recreational wellness needs to be a priority.

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To not just bounce back but also continue to deal with the pandemic, Commissioner Houck also expressed support for IT, Mansfield, and tourism. She agreed that the CDBG process is good, but that it takes a long time to get through. She would like to see money for the food industry that allows for restaurants to do different seating, and different software to order food curbside.

Mayor Kelly suggested that Commissioner Houck put her thoughts in writing to Grant Administrator Tom Hazen. He directed everyone to look at pages 3 and 4 of the application process with the eligible activities and what the dollars are actually designed for.

Commissioner Robinson inquired if tearing down the Natatorium was an eligible project to make it the park that it should be.

City Manager Doyon responded that, unfortunately, it is not an eligible project.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he agrees, generally, with the outline Commissioner Moe provided with about \$15 million for City of Great Falls projects and \$4 million for community projects. He did not agree to hand over money to GFDA, NeighborWorks or United Way without some meticulous oversight and stiff criteria. He sees nothing but problems with the idea of handing over a few million dollars to be managed and distributed by non-profit organizations. People at GFDA, NeighborWorks and United Way were not elected by the people in this community to distribute taxpayer funding the way they see fit. If there is money left over, then that money should be available for anybody that wants to submit a grant proposal. He agrees with the administrative CDBG process and then coming before the City Commission to be publicly vetted.

He appreciates what Grant Administrator Hazen laid out, but he thinks the money needs to be directly related to Covid mitigation and relief. He is having a hard time seeing a proposal for childcare for people who work downtown. He concluded that the Commission needs to proceed with extreme caution on how it does this.

Mayor Kelly responded that the mentioned non-profit organizations have administrative expertise and a wide variety of eligible projects, including things like educational disparities, promoting healthy childhood environments, promoting non-profits, supporting tourism, travel and hospitality. There is a variety of opportunities and it does not mean depleting or exhausting all of the dollars in one particular category.

City Manager Doyon inquired of the Commission what else staff could do to help the Commission with the conversation in terms of information, data or input. With regard to the discussion about having a separate committee, he reminded the Commission that ultimately the Commission would ratify any approval of the applications in a public manner as well. In response to concerns about distributing money in a way that the community was used to or had utilized before, he reminded the Commission that the City will still ultimately be accountable through the audit process and reporting process. The Commission needs to make sure that whatever is adopted, it is not going to be so onerous and cumbersome that staff will have a hard time keeping up with it. He will continue to update the Commission on any changes to guidelines or eligibility criteria. It is helpful to get responses in writing to consolidate into a document

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for the Commission and public. Staff still needs some sort of priority categorization to help with the ultimate goals from the Commission to update the application.

Mayor Kelly reported that a panel of mayors from different communities would be talking about this very topic at 1:00 pm on October 6, 2021 during the League of Cities and Towns conference. He recommended the Commission members register for the conference.

He requested that staff contact peers from other cities to find out where they are at with this conversation. The National League of Cities and Towns website also has what other communities, big and small, are doing across the country with ARPA dollars.

Commissioner Moe would like to know the commitment of the Commission in making some decisions this year, as different members would be sitting on the Commission next year.

Mayor Kelly responded that the persons sitting in these meetings should put down a road map that those in the New Year can work from. There is a learning curve for new members coming on to the Commission, but also a learning curve for how these priorities have been established prior to their arrival. The Commission also owes it to the City to identify some of the things agreed upon right away.

Grant Administrator Hazen commented that he did speak with other communities. Billings is in the same position as Great Falls. They are just getting started with their allocation and having conversations on how to use the funds. Missoula is at the other end of it. They have used a majority of their funds thus far. Missoula primarily used it for low-income housing and renovation of downtown space.

Mayor Kelly asked if those cities are using their own civic institutions or were they teaming up with other groups they have worked with in the past, and how was the money being monitored so there is public acceptance of those expenses.

Grant Administrator Hazen responded that Missoula primarily did theirs internally. Billings is looking to do some external networking for the funds. Whatever it is going to be, it will be a situation similar to Great Falls where an application process is involved. In terms of reporting and responsibility for disclosure, sub-awarding increases the load on the recipient. There will definitely need to be some level of transparency in all of this.

Commissioner Tryon noted that transparency and accountability are big components of his concern about utilizing third parties.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that the October 5, 2021, work session would consist of Director Raymond's update on the TIF application process and a continued discussion on ARPA funding. The October 19, 2021, work session will include an update from Neighborhood Council 6 and a discussion on the proposed large vehicle parking ordinance.

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ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Kelly adjourned the informal work session of September 21, 2021 at 6:45 p.m.