

**JOURNAL OF CITY COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**Virtual Meeting by Zoom**  
**October 5, 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 Jeff Hindoien; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Finance Deputy Director Kirsten Myre and Finance Grant Administrator Tom Hazen; Planning and Community Development Director Craig Raymond; and Police Captain Rob Moccasin. 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\\_jmqbweraQwGa5waZYFJXRQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jmqbweraQwGa5waZYFJXRQ)

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

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Participating via Zoom was:

**Gary Owen**, United Way of Cascade County, spoke in support of United Way being designated as a potential recipient of the City's ARPA funding. United Way is federally registered with the federal government's grant program: Sam.gov. United Way works with many organizations and the business community with common goals to stay closely informed about emerging needs and to assist the most vulnerable people in the community so they are given an opportunity to succeed. United Way has the structure in place to manage grants and demonstrate results.

**Sherrie Arey**, NeighborWorks Great Falls, also commented about the opportunity for ARPA funding and to utilize NeighborWorks' skills to help with the issues of affordable housing and, particularly, in the areas impacted the most in the qualified census tract. NeighborWorks is uniquely positioned to help with affordable housing, has a strong home buyers education and counseling program, and provides lending and down payment assistance. NeighborWorks has done a tremendous amount of blight removal and neighborhood revitalization.

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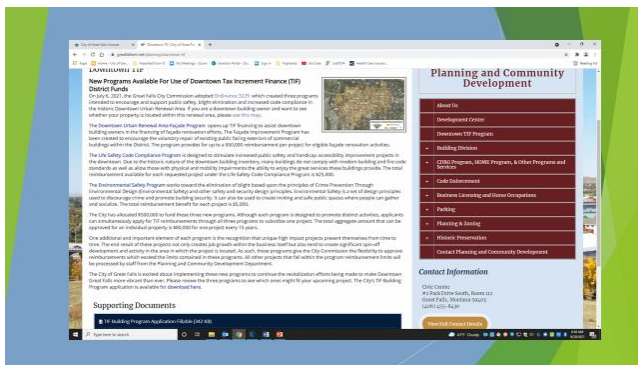
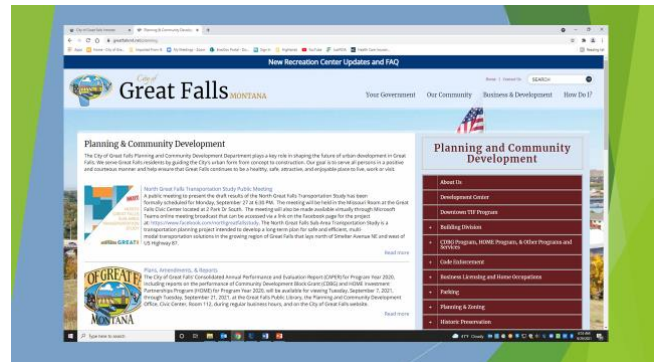
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**Beth Morrison**, City resident, expressed concern about wording in the section of Crime Task Force recommendations pertaining to “needle drop boxes and needle exchanges.” Using the word “needle” is misleading as it is part of a syringe. There is a syringe drop box at Alluvian. Anyone can dispose of syringes at drop boxes as they are not policed. Current or future medical facilities might have trepidation about installing syringe disposal boxes in the community because of the wording. These boxes are a great way to reduce harm and encourage proper disposal of medical supplies.

## 1. DOWNTOWN TIF PROGRAMS UPDATE.

Planning and Community Development Director Craig Raymond reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:



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Director Raymond reported that there are a couple of pending applications. A pre-application meeting is required with the City's project planner/manager wherein the program is explained in more detail and project details vetted to determine program eligibility.

There were four approved applications totaling \$143,105.50 that leveraged almost \$2 million dollars in private investment in the downtown.

A common issue that will be clarified in the rules/procedures is the public bidding process versus private sector contracting. Before a contractor is hired for work to be performed between \$25,000 - \$80,000, a couple of quotes are required to be documented.

Mayor Kelly inquired the turn around time from receipt of an application to funding.

Director Raymond explained cash disbursement depends, because it is a reimbursement program as opposed to a traditional grant program. The application process includes a pre-application meeting, receipt of an application, staff review and preparation of an agenda report with a recommendation for his or the Deputy Director's consideration to approve, modify or disapprove the recommendation or project. An approval letter is sent to the applicant with a Request for Payment form and request for documentation of paid invoices, and quotes from contractors. Upon receipt and review, a memo is sent to the Finance Department to cut a check to send to the applicant.

Once applications are received and projects completed, he will be sending reports to the City Commission on a quarterly basis.

In response to Commissioner Moe's inquiry about the Environmental Safety program, Director Raymond explained that two approved applications totaled the \$7,500. The maximum grant amount for the program is \$5,000. The projects tend to be small because they are for enhanced lighting or security cameras. This specific program tends to focus more lighting or cameras on private property or the transition between private and public property.

**2. AMERICAN RESCUE ACT (ARPA) FUNDING.**

Finance Grant Administrator Tom Hazen reported that the State notified the City that Public Works will be receiving some funding in connection with HB 632. Specifically, the Lift Station 1 Sanitary Sewer

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Crossing project will receive \$2 million dollars in State funding. He will present the final contract and payment schedule to the Commission when received from the State.

A memo and updated Application was sent to the Commission that synthesized discussion from the last work session into a set of goals and priorities included on page 5 of the new draft Application. He also suggested that \$40,000 be determined the minimum grant request amount. That amount allows organizations that don't have the SAM.gov registration to apply and receive funding through this program and is a good way to distribute the funds into the community. He condensed the conversation into the primary funding and project proposals that were repeatedly discussed at the last work session.

Grant Administrator Hazen requested that the Commission keep the Application discussion moving forward so that, if possible, a draft Application could be made available for public review and for organizations to see it formally and start considering their application process.

With regard to the City Parking Garages, Commissioner Robinson agreed with the updates to on-site security project proposal, but suggested other upgrades and updates need to be done to the parking garages. With regard to the allocation to local partners for further distribution project proposal, Commissioner Robinson agreed with distributing money to United Way and NeighborWorks because those organizations know the most about those kinds of programs. With regard to funding to Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA), he clarified that the funding would go to GFDA's loan fund to distribute to eligible applicants. Money is paid back with interest resulting in the loan fund getting larger.

The Commission agreed with the goals and priorities set forth in Item D. on page 5, and the minimum grant request of \$40,000 as set forth in Item 2a. on page 6.

Grant Administrator Hazen explained that SAM registration is an on-line registration and data base that tracks who is doing business with the federal government, either applying for funding or signing a contract. He estimates the process to take three weeks when the federal government is processing paper work as efficiently as possible. Right now, he estimates that process to be longer than three weeks. The SAM registration reflects certain accountability and compliance standards.

Grant Administrator Hazen suggested an application due date of July, which takes into consideration the second tranch of ARPA funding. Staff will have the opportunity to make full use of any funds received through ARPA in relation to selected projects. He further suggested the Commission aim for one round of funding grants in one big batch as early as possible. There will be a review process and demands on City staff as far as reviewing applications, finalizing grant agreements, finalizing contract agreements and numerous oversight steps to make sure the funds are being used appropriately. Funding needs to be obligated by December 2024 and spent by 2026.

Commissioner Robinson commented that there will be people or groups applying for these grants that have no background in grant submission. He hopes the City will work with the applicants of these grants.

Commissioner Houck commented she is pleased with how things are coming together. CDBG, NeighborWorks and United Way are great resources to come together to host some planning meetings to educate and prepare people to put together the grant applications. Many of the non-profits are more than

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qualified to register with SAM.gov, but don't because it comes with a cost and hefty auditing. For efficiency, she agrees with funding proposals from community non-profits.

Commissioner Moe suggested an initial screening that identifies the projects that fit the priorities most closely, and a second screening that looks at the feasibility of the project; a group training session prior to grant distribution to eliminate misunderstandings; and a training session for non-profit organizations. If the review team was internal, she inquired if there was any role that would be appropriate for the Commission to play in terms of oversight of the review process.

Manager Doyon responded that the thought was that the City has a good review process with CDBG internally, and the Commission would be approving all of the applications upon recommendation from staff.

Commissioner Moe was supportive of funding organizations more attuned to social needs within the community that are related to the priorities. United Way does an excellent job of coordinating resources in a way that has won kudos from the State in terms of dealing with the issue of homelessness in Great Falls. She thinks that may alleviate what otherwise might be a tsunami of small grant requests to the City because these other groups will be able to coordinate them as they have in the past.

Commissioner Tryon expressed concern that the Commission is signaling that United Way, GFDA and NeighborWorks are already in line to receive grants before the grant process is even started. It should be clear the grant process is open to everybody that might be eligible. He suggested the Commission be careful and not just see this as another funding source for already existing programs that are established by non-profits.

Commissioner Tryon received confirmation that the City of Great Falls is the primary recipient of the ARPA funds and responsible for its distribution. He inquired about non-profits receiving funds and distributing the funds to sub-recipients.

Manager Doyon responded that an applicant asking for a large allocation of money would describe how they would provide a process for sub-recipients. They would need to know what they are responsible for in terms of reporting back to the Commission. The Commission, by majority, can clarify this before the application is put out to the public.

Commissioner Tryon inquired and was informed ARPA funding does allow for administrative overhead costs to administer grants.

Commissioner Tryon suggested utility billing relief to residents and businesses for a year to benefit the largest number of people possible in the community, and inquired if the City would have to submit a grant application for that money to do so, or would the department have to submit that grant application.

Manager Doyon responded that the City has already done what Commission Tryon suggested over the past two budget cycles. He wouldn't recommend using ARPA funds for that purpose.

Commissioner Tryon inquired how "disproportionately impacted communities" is defined.

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Manager Doyon responded that the way the law was adopted and the funding provided there were specific populations the federal delegation and congress were trying to target more than others.

Grant Administrator Hazen added that the disproportionately impacted communities are the low income households and low income communities in particular, and they provided defined criteria for what a disproportionately impacted community is. He read Item 3 on page 4 of the draft application, and added that they provided the wording of the interim final rule and concrete criteria for determining what is or is not a disproportionately impacted community for purposes of this Act.

Commissioner Tryon referred to Page 12 Addressing Negative Economic Impacts and inquired if aid to tourism, travel or hospitality businesses had to follow the same criteria as was just read.

Grant Administrator Hazen responded that Qualified Census Tract and Disproportionately Impacted Community are detailed eligible expenses under ARPA.

Commissioner Houck added that the Chamber is another key player. It may make more sense for the Chamber to apply for a grant with the City, than to have each individual hotel or restaurant apply for grants. She is hopeful the City will partner with key players in the community to leverage ARPA money to make the community better.

Commissioner Moe commented there is value in having an application process for larger organizations that would show that they have experience with an issue that is related to the Commission's priorities, a track record of grant evaluation and management, and a record of being accountable and producing results with a large number of providers.

Mayor Kelly expressed concern about a single application deadline. He would like the community and potential applicants to weigh in on what their preference would be and the City to be able to respond to that from a staffing situation.

City Manager Doyon responded that there is language in the draft application that talks about sub-recipient criteria. Language will be inserted in the application for applicants to describe how the funds will be disbursed.

Grant Administrator Hazen summarized what he heard from the Commission was that there was agreement on the priorities and goals, and the minimum grant amount. He inquired if the Commission was satisfied with the Application as presented to post publicly so that people can start reviewing it, or does the Commission want the community's outlook on funding.

Mayor Kelly summarized that the Application is an educational tool at this point. It is not a finished product and is subject to modification. If there is no objection from the Commissioners, he directed staff to roll out the Application with the stated caveats. No one objected.

Manager Doyon reiterated that staff will post it for comment for a defined period of time and then ask the Commission to approve it.

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Manager Doyon added that the next time ARPA is a topic on the work session agenda, he would like the Commission to address CARES Act items, such as parking, events, pools, and areas that the City had to close a facility or stop a revenue stream. The Civic Center has been discussed with regard to its interior and exterior. With CARES Act money there is an opportunity to address office space needs for the Civic Center well into the future. A lot of what is on the City's CIP plan is not eligible for ARPA funds, so he is trying to maximize the use of the funds for the community and minimize future taxpayer impacts with those expenditures, if at all possible. Some of the items anticipated to be taken care of in the future may be able to be taken care of now. Basically, that may help the City with cash flow on other needs. He discussed ARPA eligible projects, hoping some of those expenditures can be strategic on the City's front for maximized use of those funds for the community by addressing long term needs and minimizing the impact down the road for the taxpayers.

**DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS**

Due to lack of time, potential upcoming work session topics will be discussed during the Commission meeting.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Kelly adjourned the informal work session of October 5, 2021 at 6:55 p.m.