

JOURNAL OF SPECIAL CITY COMMISSION WORK SESSION MEETING
The Ranches at Belt Creek, 277 Armington Road, Belt, MT
February 15, 2023

City Commission Retreat

City Commission members present: Bob Kelly, Eric Hinebauch, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, and Susan Wolff.

Staff present: City Manager Greg Doyon, Deputy City Manager Chuck Anderson, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz

Facilitator: Mark Willmarth, Training/Development Coordinator

Lunch – 12:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kelly called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

1. FACILITATED SESSION WITH MARK WILLMARTH ON COMMISSION PRIORITIES FOR 2023

Facilitator Mark Willmarth provided an overview of the retreat proceedings. Before getting in to a review of the past year and upcoming priorities, he had the Commission members think about the past year community issues that were complicated or complex. The Commission members discussed homelessness, Crime Task Force, crime issues, ARPA funds, Big Sky Aim High Indoor Pool project, managing expectations and potential solutions. Facilitator Willmarth summarized “we can’t address complex challenges with complicated solutions” and “leadership is different depending on whether it is complicated or complex.”

City Manager Greg Doyon reviewed and discussed his 2022 work plan:

1. Maximum leverage of CARES/ARPA and the Infrastructure Bill

The Commission prioritized a long list of requests. Some of the requests on the Tier One list are yet to be fully vetted because the City is still waiting for some estimates and proposals. The City did a good job putting the money where it is most needed.

Manager Doyon commented that allowing the hiring of Tom Hazen and Sylvia Tarman was critical in managing CARES/ARPA funds and projects. He would also like Sylvia to administer the CIP projects for all departments.

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2. Commission Education and Transition

A deliberative attempt was made to get the new Commission members out and oriented to the facilities and to meet staff they would be working with. When new Department Heads were hired, he had them reach out to the Commission members to begin building relationships. He hopes the Commission members felt like they were supported properly and are continuing to be supported properly in their roles.

3. Balancing daily operations with everything on “the plate:”

- The Aim High Big Sky project is moving along pretty smoothly for a project of that size.
- He is mindful of the Crime Task Force recommendations and implementing what he can, but also waiting to see what can be addressed should the Public Safety Levy get approved.
- Legal had a meeting with the software vendor to transition back to what the City had to begin with because what staff is using now is not working for the City at all.
- He suggested freezing the ARPA Tier One projects while awaiting proposals to come back, and suspending use of CARES funds until the budget is completed. There is no rush on the CARES funds and that provides some flexibility. He has a strong suspicion that, due to where the City is economically and where we are with the Legislature, CARES funds will be needed to balance the budget just to get basic things done. He has been saying to Department Heads that the budget will probably be done coming out of collecting bargaining negotiations.

4. Department collaboration and work life balance of employees

There was a residual effect coming out of Covid. He has been checking in with Department Heads and having more one on one time to give them the opportunity to talk about things that they're struggling with or things that they need his help with. He is trying to make sure that they're managing and balancing their work/life.

Department collaboration is ongoing management of an organization with people that have different desires and goals. It is at the forefront of his mind to make sure Department Heads are working with each other.

5. Addressing HR Challenges

An HR Symposium was conducted. Although lightly attended, the futurist and other speakers that came from Texas were appreciated. Having Linda Malisani doing the recruitment has been helpful. Remote work and appealing benefits are being considered. There is no one answer for recruitment anymore.

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6. Emerging Leader Program

Generally, the program has been well received. Putting the program together has been a learning experience for him. Once he gets feedback from the Department Heads and their employees, he will be considering if he would do it again in the same way, make changes so that the program is more productive for participants, or shift the focus to more of a supervisory training. He will include the Commission in recognizing the participants that completed the program.

7. Leadership Montana

He has been keeping the Commission updated after each session. He has been through a lot of programs, and emphasized that he is getting a lot from this program. He is promoting it because he wants some of the Department Head team to go through the program as well. It is geared towards what you can bring to your organization and what you could bring to the State of Montana in terms of having conversations and working through difficult things. He has been challenged in ways that he did not expect. He has also tried a few things with the Department Head team to get them thinking about some of their challenges and how they might approach things a little different as well.

8. City Commission Priorities

With Craig Raymond's upcoming departure and after the hard transition of pulling an engineer from the Public Works Engineering Division into Planning and Community Development and then having that person leave, the engineer for the development review process is going back to the Engineering Division. The review process is not going to change. It will still start with the Planning Department for review and coordination. It just won't be done with an engineer in the Planning and Community Development Department.

Because we have new leadership who understands that it is management's and the Commission's priority, he met with engineering staff in part to make sure that they are taking the process equally seriously. The new Public Works Director brings an excellent leadership credential to the department. Director Gaub is very deliberate, very methodical, he's thoughtful, and he's working very tightly with HR. They are promoting the right people in the department and Chris is clearly laying out his expectations.

Communication between the Public Works and Planning and Community Development Directors is a big function of that review process, and making sure that the City Engineer will be held accountable.

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The new Planning and Community Development Director position is being recruited and will be broader than what has been done in the past. He encouraged the Commission to send what they'd like to see in the next director his way.

9. Focus on City facilities and resources

He is not anticipating a lot of flexibility in the FY 24 budget. A lot will depend on the Legislature. The caveat to that is, while he is looking at the budget, there might not be a whole lot that can be done to satisfy some of the needs of City facilities.

Mayor Kelly started a roundtable discussion about doing a better job translating to the public that when the City receives an influx of funds from state, federal, BARSSA, etc., where those monies will be spent, and if those dollars will give relief to the proprietary funds that are targeted to charge more for services to get infrastructure projects done.

After reviewing the summary of City Manager accomplishments over the last year, Commissioner Tryon commented he was impressed with what Manager Doyon has done, is doing, and how he is managing the City.

Facilitator Willmarth commenced the following roundtable discussions.

What is different today than a year ago when Commission set priorities with regard to the community, the organization, or the Commission itself.

Commissioner Wolff responded that the five Commission members are working very well together and have learned to do that quickly. Members might not always agree but are not disagreeable, and that has been noticed out in the community. Within a month of the last retreat the Commission was already dealing with some heavy community topics. The level of trust developed quickly.

Commissioners Hinebauch and Tryon agreed.

With regard to the community, Mayor Kelly commented that we were still coming out of Covid and getting comfortable again with being together. Another thing that is different from last year that he thinks is solidly in place is that the community of Great Falls knows that it's going to be changing in the next half-dozen years. Growth is inevitable. It is coming and people know that the responsible thing to do is to prepare for it. It is going to be a fairly dynamic next half-dozen years.

We need to keep spreading that message that growth is coming. The public safety levy request is absolutely an indication that citizens will have to decide, and to understand that growth is here and Great Falls better start getting up to speed. Being cognizant of that, it changes the focus of the Commission to always be forward looking.

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Another message to get out to the community is to be aware of the other challenges that the legislators are throwing our way in taking away local ability to control our own destiny. Legislators that work in Helena for 90-days every two years don't know what is best for each community.

Commissioner Tryon agreed that change is coming. He added that there are a lot of people that don't want change. That attitude is probably more prevalent than what we would like to recognize. He thinks that has gone a long ways to keeping Great Falls kind of stagnant for the last 40 years.

Facilitator Willmarth inquired what will that mean for the work the Commission does moving forward?

Commissioner Tryon continued that he thinks it will be more of a challenge to communicate that change is coming, like it or not. The Commission will need to communicate that let's make that change the way we want it instead of having it forced on us from outside.

Commissioner McKenney commented that Great Falls has changed. When he moved here in 1981, Market Place, Target-Albertson's complex, Fuddrucker's, both Walmarts, Sam's Club, and Shopko did not exist. What hadn't changed was the population and prospects of a good livelihood and keeping our children here.

Commissioner Wolff commented that will take more time and more thinking on what words to use to encourage people to examine how they think, and to educate people so that they may see something differently.

Commissioner Tryon also discussed seeing a change in culture amongst City employees and departments the last several years. It's more professional and we're here to serve you attitude.

What has changed and how that compares to a year ago. What does that mean to them now, as they look into the future.

A roundtable discussion continued. Commonalities included:

- There is more work to be done on certain partnerships.
- We're in a better position to make progress.
- We're in a unique time compared to last year because of the Legislature and the challenges coming up with that.
- The Commission is working well together.
- The organizational culture continues to improve.
- This Commission, manager and department heads built a firm foundation and are ready to take it to the next step.
- The demeanor of the Commission meetings has changed, is more welcoming and open, and makes a difference to the public.
- The relationship with the legislative delegation is improving.

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- Working through the United Methodist Church issues was a fair process.
- Listening to both sides and sending the marijuana issue to a vote of the people seemed to reach a happy medium.

Facilitator Willmarth summarized that the Commission will be leading through change, thus complexity. Things are beginning to shift in ways Great Falls hasn't seen for a long time. A good foundation will help the Commission figure out how to address the significant changes.

Commissioner Hinebauch noted that there are a lot of people in his age group that are glad to see the change. He is not hearing complaints.

The Commission had a lot on its plate this past year. Mayor Kelly commented that Manager Doyon is good at telegraphing his intentions. He thanked Manager Doyon for keeping the Commission informed of what was coming up and the sequence of events and work that was being done. The same is true with the public safety levy process.

Break 2:25 – 2:42 p.m.

What were the Commission's greatest accomplishments, and what did you hope to accomplish but didn't?

Commissioner Hinebauch discussed getting the ARPA funds out to community partners was important to him, as well as tackling the homeless situation at the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) and not letting it drag out a lot longer. He is excited about the public safety levy process moving forward.

Commissioner Tryon commented that getting the public safety levy defined and articulated and to the point it is at now was a great accomplishment. The people and agencies involved with the First United Methodist Church dealt with a lot of big issues and some of the broader social, cultural and crime issues. The Commission focused on the things the City could actually do that deal directly with public safety, public infrastructure and the code process.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the Commission being proactive on the public safety levy and to offer it to the community was a big accomplishment. The issues at the FUMC turned out well because the City and community leaders took the situation seriously and handled it. The marijuana issue came at the Commission unexpectedly, but was also an accomplishment because it was handled well. He concluded that communication and not being afraid to disagree is vital.

With regard to the FUMC, Mayor Kelly added that one of the reasons the situation ended in success was because the Commission and City utilized its strengths, a police force who were sympathetic and empathetic in their constant dealings with those at FUMC, Manager Doyon's high degree of respect in reporting updates at City Commission meetings, and the work of the great network of agencies and professionals.

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Mayor Kelly commented that the public safety levy is huge. Much like the Park Maintenance District that gave great relief to the general fund and was able to make better amenities that were visible for the community, if the public safety levy passes it will be transformational. It's a pivotal moment. Right now it is critical to focus all of the energy on the relevance and importance of the public safety levy. He also believes the City will have an opportunity to see some transformation out of the \$3 million in ARPA funds that were awarded to community partners.

Commissioner Wolff agreed that the public safety levy was, continues to be, and will be one of the Commission's greatest accomplishments. There is a lot of work and a lot of education ahead of them.

Break 3:39 – 3:50 p.m.

What are the top agreed upon issues/priorities of the Commission in the next 12-18 months?

A roundtable discussion followed. Items of commonality that the Commission collectively focused on were:

- Focus efforts on passing the Public Safety Levy
 - Town Hall Meeting(s)
 - Plan B education pertaining to the consequences if the Public Safety Levy doesn't pass to address the needs
- Complete an updated Growth Plan/Policy
 - Manager Doyon noted that it is needed enough that he would recommend using fund balance to pay to get it done, after a new Director is hired
 - Align development review process and City Code with the Growth Policy
- Get Great Falls Legislative Delegation on board and representing the interests of the Great Falls community and keeping decisions local
- Engage more with the public at meetings, when appropriate, and keeping management of the meeting and time
- Explore use of TIF funds for City properties in the TIF District, such as an evidence building or seating for the auditorium
- Explore the proposition of creating a Transit District that includes the incorporated city limits and expands as new properties are annexed; and expanding routes
- Municipal Court relocation after determining if Children's Museum is a possibility
- Cascade County agreements
- Energy savings report
- City Manager's annual review

Manager Doyon provided an update on Great Falls Emergency Services. Deputy City Manager Chuck Anderson provided an overview of the upcoming Collective Bargaining negotiation process.

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Facilitator Willmarth summarized that part of the Commission conversation talked about change and having a good foundation. He encouraged the Commission to think about that moving forward because there is a lot to be said about having a good foundation. It allows the Commission to address change and the complex things in the community that are important to the Commission. If the Commission wasn't working well together, it would be harder for the Commission to work through some of those things.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the informal special Commission Work Session of February 15, 2023, adjourned at 4:48 p.m.