

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
August 1, 2023

City Commission Work Session
Civic Center, Gibson Room 212

Mayor Kelly presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM

CITY COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Bob Kelly, Susan Wolff, Joe McKenney, Eric Hinebauch and Rick Tryon.

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Greg Doyon and Deputy City Manager Chuck Anderson; City Attorney David Dennis; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler; Municipal Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec; Library Director Susie McIntyre; Human Resources Director Gaye McInerney; Park and Recreation Director Steve Herring; Fire Chief Jeremy Jones; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Richard Irving, City resident, expressed appreciation to the Commission and City staff for its efforts with regard to speaking loud enough and having the PA system set well for the hard of hearing. Referring to the recent library levy election that passed, Mr. Irving opined that the library has blown the City Commission's nonpartisan cover by conducting an extremely partisan election. He commented that the Commission needs to convince the voters that it is a nonpartisan government and would operate the levy in a nonpartisan way before putting the Public Safety Levy on the ballot. Mr. Irving expressed concern about a commercial promoting the library levy made the voters seem like "hillbillies" who need to have aristocrats at the library teach children in the community to read. He suggested that the Commission consider appointing library board members who will convince the public that the Commission is exercising effective oversight of the library and the Commission is a nonpartisan government.

Mayor Kelly responded to Mr. Irving that the election for the library levy and library rules and regulations emanate from the library and the Commission does not have any jurisdiction in that area.

Shyla Patera, North Central Independent Living Services, Inc. submitted written comments, via August 1, 2023 email, in support of building affordable accessible universally housing stock, as well as funding for accessible home modifications. Ms. Patera commented that because universally designed housing can be hard to find and secure, housing crisis intervention teams need to be activated to mediate any barriers finding and securing universally designed housing.

1. UPDATE FROM CONTINUUM OF CARE GREAT FALLS MONTANA

The Continuum of Care (CoC) group included: United Way of Cascade County President Gary Owen; St. Vincent de Paul Director of Homeless Services Carley Tuss and Executive Director Deb Kottel; YWCA Great Falls Executive Director Sandi Filipowicz; Great Falls Rescue Mission Executive Director Jim McCormick; Library Director Susie McIntyre; and NeighborWorks Great Falls Executive Director Sherrie Arey.

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Mr. Owen, Ms. Tuss and Ms. Filipowicz reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:

<p style="text-align: center;">Continuum of Care Great Falls Montana</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"Our goal is to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring in our community"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What is the Continuum of Care?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A coalition of housing agencies, homeless shelters, and service providers working together to provide resources and housing opportunities to homeless individuals and families.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Agencies include: United Way, Opportunities, Inc., GF Rescue Mission, NeighborWorks GF, the Mercy Home of the YWCA GF, Family Promise, St. Vincent de Paul's Grace Home, GF Public Library, Alluvion Health, Indian Family Health Clinic, Alliance for Youth, Many Rivers Whole Health...– Mental and physical health partners, law enforcement, school district, Mayor
<p style="text-align: center;">What does the Continuum of Care do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate services<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Meet monthly = continuous communication– Address gaps and increased needs– Coordinated entry – housing first philosophy• Case Conferencing<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Eviction prevention– Emergency shelter through local nonprofits– Transition to housing– Wraparound services	<p style="text-align: center;">Results of coordinated effort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• People helped<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 2021: 30 households/61 individuals secured housing.– 2022: 53 households/107 individuals secured housing.– As of June 30, 2023: 48 households secured housing.• More effective coordinated entry<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 2022: 107 Assessments total– 2023: 147 Coordinated Entry Assessments have been completed.– January 2022: 27 households/60 individuals on the by-name list.– June 2023: 202 households/335 individuals on the by-name list.
<p style="text-align: center;">How many are homeless in our community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual Point In Time Survey:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 2023: 217 Great Falls; 2,178 statewide– 2019: 223 Great Falls; 1,343 statewide• By-Name List: 335 in June• Reported increase in demand for services at community agencies<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 80 on a Sunday for lunch at the Angel Center– Mercy Home, Cameron Center, Family Promise consistently full & turning people away– Opportunities Inc. managing more need than available Housing Choice Vouchers	<p style="text-align: center;">Explaining the increased visibility of unhoused</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased housing costs• Decrease in availability of low-income rentals• Mental health Crisis• Increased addiction issues• Intimate Partner Abuse• Moving people from hidden camping spots• Increased awareness nationally and regionally (news stories)

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<p style="text-align: center;">Types of Homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily Homeless • Episodically Homeless • Chronically Homeless 	<p style="text-align: center;">Temporarily Homeless</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons who experience only one spell of homelessness (usually short) and who are not seen again by the homeless assistance system • 80% of those who experience homelessness • Often exit within 3 to 4 weeks
<p style="text-align: center;">Episodically Homeless</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who use the system with intermittent frequency but usually for short periods • 10% of those who experience homelessness 	<p style="text-align: center;">Chronic Homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HUD Definition of Chronic Homelessness: A <i>chronically homeless</i> person is an "unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years." • 10% of those who experience homelessness <p><small>*On January 31, 2008, volunteers with the annual Montana Survey of the Homeless identified 184 persons considered chronically homeless by the HUD definition: 169 of them had a diagnosed disability.</small></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Who are our chronically homeless neighbors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most visible of the homeless • Multiple, interrelated problems with deep roots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – History of childhood abuse – History of trauma – Deep poverty – Illness (including mental illness and addiction) – Lack of connection to the broader community – Lack education – Unstable work histories – Lack of skills 	<p style="text-align: center;">Challenges of chronically homeless</p> <p>The chronically homeless share a host of characteristics that make them difficult to serve, particularly within context of traditional service systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemical dependence, mental illness, physical and developmental disabilities are common. • The behaviors that rise from these issues often lead to incarceration or institutionalization, multiple hospitalizations and emergency room use.

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<p style="text-align: center;">Progress in action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alluvion PATH Grant• Rescue Mission ability to expand women's housing• GFPS expanded support for homeless students• Alliance of Youth community kitchen, youth resource center• St. Vincent community kitchen and outreach• Mobile Response Team• Opportunities Inc. expanded support for CoC• Restarting of Family Promise services	<p style="text-align: center;">Hope on the Horizon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baatz Building – 24 units• Grace Haven: St. Vincent building for female veterans• YWCA: seeking building for transitional housing for IPV survivors• Expanded response in rural counties (prevent migration)
<p style="text-align: center;">What can the City Commission do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be mindful of the issue when setting policy:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Housing options including low-income housing– Mental Health/Substance Abuse services– Public Transportation & Public Safety– Crisis/Disaster Management– CDBG/HOME funds– Access to public restrooms and clean water sources– Best practices for police response– Support for Treatment Courts, Mental Health Courts• Play a leadership role in helping other local governments respond to homelessness as close to the problem as possible• Advocate for support from State CoC (GF is the only big 7 community that doesn't receive direct CoC funding).	<p style="text-align: center;">What can the community do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Become informed, have empathy<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Reduce violence• Support local nonprofits, schools, & churches working on issues<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Donate– Volunteer (volunteergreatfalls.org)• Advocate for change<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Federal, State, & Local
<p style="text-align: center;">Questions & Discussion</p>	

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Mr. Owen explained that the CoC's mission is to make everyone realize that homeless individuals are struggling and that "they are not people to be scared of, but people to be scared for." He encouraged the Commission to be mindful of the issues discussed tonight and aware that this vulnerable population needs all of us to care about them. He reported that Alliance for Youth received a grant for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project and the Montana CoC application for the Baatz Building Project was top rated and the highest scoring.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that Housed Great Falls is a nonprofit that is doing fundraising and trying to meet the full match to acquire property to build a "tiny-home" transitional shelter community in Great Falls. Commissioner Wolff mentioned that after spending a day with the Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR), she saw firsthand how first responders are used as a taxi service for citizens who cannot afford transportation.

Commissioner McKenney inquired how often the homeless encampments are checked, reasons why homeless individuals refuse assistance and about the Mobile Response Team (MRT)

Ms. Kottel responded that St. Vincent de Paul provides outreach to homeless encampments at least twice a year and cleans up the encampments four times a year. Homeless individuals may not accept assistance due to mental illness, self-sabotaging behaviors, low self-esteem, and a lack of same day beds. St. Vincent de Paul is currently working with five full-time employed homeless individuals who cannot be housed due to the lack of affordable housing.

Library Director Susie McIntyre responded that the MRT is a crisis team who are trained mental health professionals that responds to calls involving individuals with mental illness. Currently, the MRT responds with the police, but it is working towards being able to respond without the police.

Police Chief Jeff Newton added that the MRT also provides assistance to individuals with mental illness by getting them the services they need, which frees up law enforcement to deal with what they are trained to do. Emergency medical dispatching protocol has changed to include asking additional questions to determine if the individual is in crisis. The goal is that MRT personnel would be able to respond to mental illness related calls without the police.

Commissioner McKenney commented that it is very common for homeless individuals to utilize the hospitality industry for its restrooms and water. He inquired if anything is being done about providing public restrooms and clean water sources to the homeless.

Mr. Owen responded that the Angel Services Center gets utilized the most for that; however, the homeless will use whatever is convenient, including the Great Falls Rescue Mission, Great Falls Public Library and any public facility. Being compassionate, while at the same time, recognizing the needs of businesses and capacity of organizations to handle that kind of influx needs to be considered.

Ms. Kottel added that because the water was turned off in the parks, there are no working public water fountains. St. Vincent de Paul buys two pallets of water monthly just to keep the homeless hydrated. St. Vincent de Paul also provides showers to the homeless and are booked every day. Alluvion Health provides vouchers to homeless individuals who are receiving treatment to shower at the Great Falls Recreation Center.

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Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the “by-name list” is more accurate than the annual point in time survey and individuals who choose to be homeless are not making a valid choice if they are experiencing mental health or substance abuse issues. Commissioner Tryon expressed appreciation to all of the organizations and groups that contributed to dealing with the encampment at the First United Methodist Church. He commented that we all need to be empathetic to the homeless; however, organizations that deal with homeless issues need to understand the community’s legitimate concerns about public safety and sanitation that arises out of homeless encampments. With regard to the “What can the City Commission do” slide, Commissioner Tryon inquired about the best practices for police response.

Mr. Owen responded that the best practices for police response would be for the Great Falls Police Department to continue to explore innovative ways to address the homeless issue.

Commissioner Hinebauch expressed appreciation to the CoC for its efforts with regard to the work it does in the community.

Mayor Kelly commented that without the coordination of these services being done by the CoC, the community would be forced to confront homeless issues significantly more than it does. It can be difficult working with a variety of nonprofit agencies that are funded by a range of sources; however, the CoC has produced a bureaucracy miracle by creating confidential Memorandum of Understanding (MOU’s) amongst each other. Mayor Kelly expressed appreciation to the CoC for its determination and persistence responding the homeless crisis and being good stewards of the Community Block Development Grant (CBDG) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) funds.

City Manager Greg Doyon expressed appreciation to the CoC for the informative presentation, dealing with many challenges and its partnership and collaboration. He commented that there is only so much the City can do about homeless issues with limited capacity and expertise. He mentioned that Human Resources Training/Development Coordinator Mark Willmarth speaks about there not being just one easy solution dealing with complex problems and continuing to work on the problem to make a positive impact on individuals. The business community might be able to support the CoC in a way the City cannot and there needs to be further discussion with downtown businesses. He concluded that he would check into the water being turned off in the parks.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that the August 15, 2023 work session will consist of lead water service line replacement project and energy consulting contract updates.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Kelly adjourned the informal work session of August 1, 2023 at 6:50 p.m.