

# JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

Regular City Commission Meeting

Mayor Reeves presiding  
Commission Chambers, Room 206

**CALL TO ORDER:** 7:00 PM

## **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL/STAFF INTRODUCTIONS:** City Commission members present: Cory Reeves, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, Shannon Wilson, and Susan Wolff. Also present were City Manager Greg Doyon; Public Works Director Chris Gaub; Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler and Grant Administrator Tom Hazen; City Attorney David Dennis; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** There were no proposed changes to the agenda by the City Manager or City Commission. The Agenda was approved as presented.

**CONFLICT DISCLOSURE/EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:** None.

## **COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

### **1. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM CITY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT.**

Marci Wolff, Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Breastfeeding Counselor, reported that WIC is a supplemental nutrition program that provides access to healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and support for families/caregivers of young children, and resources and referrals for other services. Ms. Wolff helps mothers and babies learn breastfeeding skills and overcome any challenges they face. WIC serves over 51% of births in the United States and she currently supports 125 breastfeeding families in Cascade County. Breastfeeding provides infants with nutrition, protection from diseases and bonding with the mother and lowers the risk of developing diseases in the mother, is convenient and cost effective.

This year's world Breastfeeding week theme is "Breastfeeding in the event of an emergency." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests making an emergency feeding kit for infants and toddlers because direct breastfeeding is the safest and most hygienic way to feed a child in the event of an emergency. Ms. Wolff works with nutritionist, registered dieticians and public health nurses to support the breastfeeding mother's goal. WIC works with employers of breastfeeding mothers and a variety of people with different social statuses to make them aware that breastfeeding mothers do not need to choose between earning an income or providing nutrition to their baby.

WIC collaborates with the Northwest Mothers Milk Bank in Oregon to provide drop sites for breastfeeding mothers to donate frozen breast milk for premature babies. WIC is working on a project to provide deep freezer storage to breastfeeding mothers who may not have enough storage for their milk. Cascade County won a new universal home visiting grant that allows for home visits for all women of Cascade County. The City-County Health Department's website is [cascadecountymt.gov](http://cascadecountymt.gov).

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**  
**July 16, 2024**

2.

**PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**Ben Forsyth**, City resident, provided and discussed handouts about the harms of marijuana and suggested regulations to reduce local cannabis harms.

**Ron Deberry**, City resident, provided and discussed a Great Falls Housing Authority newsletter stating that its maintenance team will be removing all screen doors by summer/fall 2024 on all sites due to the high cost of repairs and replacement. Mr. Deberry expressed concern that rain and snow will ruin door jams, insects will get in and tenants without air conditioning will not be able to get fresh air.

**John Hubbard**, City resident, discussed issues with the Covid vaccine, justice system and state government.

**Kollin Schade**, Calumet Montana Refining Plant Manager, commented that Calumet has been a vital part of the community for over 100 years and is committed to being a safe and reliable operation. Mr. Schade extended an invitation to the Commission to tour the refinery.

**Eric Bakely**, City resident, commented that years ago he worked for a Public Access Station and would be willing to help the City grow by offering his services.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, expressed concern about Commissioner Wilson's initiative from a prior commission meeting about the need of installing Portland Loo restrooms downtown using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds. Ms. Dodd explained that there are documented issues including excessive crime and maintenance/ repair costs. She urged the Commission to use caution with regard to considering this initiative. Ms. Dodd expressed appreciation to the economic stability Calumet provides; however, requested that Calumet pay its taxes instead of protesting them because tax payers should not have to make up for the revenue lost to the general fund.

**NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS**

3. **MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

None.

**BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

4. **MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

None.

## JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

### 5. REAPPOINTMENT TO THE AUDIT COMMITTEE.

Mayor Reeves reported that Jeff Heibel was appointed to the Audit Committee on May 2, 2023 to fill the remainder of a three-year term expiring on June 30, 2024. Staff reached out to Mr. Heibel and he is interested in remaining on the Committee for another three years. The advertisement for this vacancy was done through the City's Website and the local media. No applications were received.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, that the City Commission reappoint Jeff Heibel to the Audit Committee to fill a private citizen position for a three-year term through June 30, 2027.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner McKenney supports the appointment of Jeff Heibel. Commissioner McKenney commented that Mr. Heibel is an active member, knowledgeable about audit issues and participates in discussions.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### 6. REAPPOINTMENT/APPOINTMENT TO THE POLICE COMMISSION.

Mayor Reeves reported that Mr. Kasuske was appointed to the Police Commission on July 7, 2020 for a partial term and reappointed for his first full three-year term on July 6, 2021. The current term ends on June 30, 2024. He is interested and eligible for a second three-year term. In accordance with Resolution 10524, City staff advertised for the position and received two additional applications. Applications were received from Richard (Rich) Hollis and Daniel Barnett. Mr. Barnett was recently appointed to the Ethics Committee but is interested in also serving on the Police Commission. This is permitted with City Commission approval.

The Police Commission met on June 28, 2024 to review applications and make a recommendation to the City Commission. The Police Commission recommended the reappointment of Mr. Morgan Kasuske.

**Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner McKenney, that the City Commission reappoint Morgan Kasuske to the Police Commission for a three-year term through June 30, 2027.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner Tryon commented that there were two other good applicants; however, because the Police Commission recommended Mr. Kasuske and he has experience, it would be appropriate to reappoint him.

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**  
**July 16, 2024**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

**CITY MANAGER**

**7. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

City Manager Greg Doyon made the following announcements:

- Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) has been working with the State Department of Emergency Services and BNSF to secure a rail tanker car that will allow GFFR personnel to train for spills and confined space training. BNSF and other local entities are working to transport the tanker car to the Training Center by the end of August. This project has been funded through donations.
- The Scheels Aim High Big Sky Facility opened last week and Mayor Pro Tempore Wolff attended the grand opening and cut the ribbon. Several people from the community attended and the turnout was better than expected.
- The Finance Utility Department is still in the process of implementing online utility payments. The City is not charging late fees or penalties, sending out delinquent notices, or disconnecting services during this transition. Online and phone payments remain disabled and the online payment system should be available in the next month. The current mailed bills do not include return envelopes because of printing issues; however, should be included in the mailed bills next month. The City apologizes for the inconvenience and appreciates the community's patience.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he was asked by a concerned citizen why a berm, to cut down on light pollution, was not installed between the Scheels Aim High Big Sky Facility parking lot and homes directly to the east.

City Manager Doyon responded that he would look into it and report to the Commission.

Commissioner McKenney added that the same concerned citizen, as well as other citizens in that neighborhood, brought up issues with increased traffic in that area. Commissioner McKenney suggested having yield or stop signs installed.

**CONSENT AGENDA.**

- 8.** Minutes, July 2, 2024, City Commission Meeting.
- 9.** Total Expenditures of \$5,593,665 for the period of June 20, 2024 through July 3, 2024, to include claims over \$25,000, for \$4,659,864.
- 10.** Contracts List.

## JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

11. Set a public hearing for Resolution 10556 to Levy and Assess the General Boulevard District No. 3570 for August 20, 2024.
12. Set a public hearing for Resolution 10557 to Levy and Assess Great Falls Park District No. 1 for August 20, 2024.
13. Set a public hearing for Resolution 10558 to Levy and Assess Properties within Special Improvement Lighting Districts for August 20, 2024.
14. Set a public hearing for Resolution 10559 to Levy and Assess the Portage Meadows Maintenance District No. 1195 for August 20, 2024.
15. Set a public hearing for Resolution 10560 to Levy and Assess the Street Maintenance District for August 20, 2024.
16. Approve a final payment for the 7th Avenue Northwest Paving project, in the amount of \$135,067.68 to United Materials of Great Falls, Inc., and \$1,364.32 to the State Miscellaneous Tax Fund and authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents. **OF 1806.2**
17. Award a contract in the amount of \$849,396.60 to Insituform Technologies, LLC, for the Sanitary Sewer Trenchless Rehabilitation Phase 26, and authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents. **OF 1675.9**

**Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioners McKenney and Wolff, that the City Commission approve the Consent Agenda as presented.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public.

**John Hubbard**, City resident, expressed opposition to items 11 through 15 and tax increases.

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Referring to agenda item 16, Commissioner Wolff commented that she always likes final payments.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

18. **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) BUDGET AND WORK PLAN.**

Mayor Reeves declared the public hearing open and asked for presentation of the agenda report.

## JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

BID Executive Director Kellie Pierce reported that this year's budget is straightforward with no major changes. There was an amendment at the end of FY24 to allocate some funds received from its expansion in 2020. A lighting study for exploring different lighting options for downtown in the amount of \$25,000 and new holiday décor were added to the budget. The BID was established in 1989 and renews every 10 years.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of Executive Director Pierce.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the \$25,000 for the lighting project needs to be used within the BID District and is a matching amount for a bigger project in the Masterplan boundary area.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of or in opposition to the BID Budget and Work Plan.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission accept the FY 2025 Business Improvement District Budget and Work Plan.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner Wolff recommended that Executive Director Pierce explore Old Town Fort Collins for opportunities to see how amazing their downtown is.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the BID is a success story for this community and has a good group of community activists that do excellent work.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **19. TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (TBID) BUDGET AND WORK PLAN.**

Mayor Reeves declared the public hearing open and asked for presentation of the agenda report.

TBID Tourism Content Director Shannon Newth reported that this past fiscal year was down about 6 % over the previous fiscal year. The TBID continues to benchmark against 2019, which indicates that it is returning to a pre-covid tourism cycle. The TBID developed a Travel Industry Growth Plan and Great Falls Montana Tourism Strategic Plan and implemented strategies from both. There was an error in the comparison budget sheet; however, it was updated to reflect FY24/25 rather than FY23/24. The TBID trimmed its leisure traveler markets to get more impressions within a smaller set of markets for a greater impact. The TBID will secure a public relations firm to build national and regional media relations and pitch story ideas about the community. A Tourism Events Planner was hired to focus on large-scale signature events during the off peak occupancy times and connect with organizers of established events to help attract overnight visitors. Historically, approximately 50% of people coming to Great Falls are just passing through and the TBID is hoping to attract more

## JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

people with welcome billboards along Interstate 15 and into Great Falls. The TBID is investing in some resident sentiment efforts through a small spend with Great Falls market of a few key paid media and grassroots efforts. Although not listed in this year's budget, the TBID plans to use reserves to support new flights into Great Falls. These funds are usually commitments before becoming expenses and the TBID does not expect to spend funds on this effort until next fiscal year. The TBID assessments collected are from travelers staying in lodging properties less than 30 days, City funds are not used for TBID operations and TBID pays rent to occupy its building.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of Tourism Content Director Newth.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of or in opposition to the TBID Budget and Work Plan.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, that the City Commission accept the 2024/2025 Tourism Business Improvement District Budget and Work Plan.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### 20. **CDBG & HOME 2024-2025 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN NEEDS HEARING.**

Mayor Reeves declared the public hearing open and asked for presentation of the agenda report.

Grant Administrator Tom Hazen reported that this public hearing is part of an annual process that is an obligation of all Entitlement Communities that receive Community Block Development Grant (CDBG)/HOME Investment Partnerships Program funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Every year entitlement communities, such as Great Falls, are required to prepare an Annual Action Plan that will identify priorities for potential funding. The participation of local partners is an indispensable step in the preparation of the plan.

The purpose of this hearing is to allow the community an opportunity to provide commentary related to observed needs. The City Commission is not required to take action this evening. The information presented this evening will be compiled by Staff and presented for approval to the Commission in the form of a draft of the Annual Action Plan at the August 6, 2024 City Commission Meeting. If approved by the Commission, the Annual Action Plan would then be submitted to HUD. Currently, Staff is recommending the prioritization of programs that will address affordable housing, residential housing rehabilitation, public services, slum and blight.

Additionally, Staff is recommending a change to the Competitive Application process. Last Year, an annual competitive application process was implemented. This model allowed one window per year for applicants to submit applications for review. This process has drawn nearly universal opposition from community partners. This model limits the flexibility of program implementation

## JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

and presents extreme difficulties in acquiring listed blighted properties that are not likely to remain on the market for periods of 6 months or more. Therefore, Staff is recommending altering the annual application process. However, the previous rolling model, which allowed applications to be submitted at any time during the year, presented difficulties in meeting HUD's timeliness requirements. Therefore, Staff is suggesting a quarterly application process as a compromise. This timeline would provide more opportunities for the community to apply for and secure HUD funding while also allowing the City a more structured schedule. The Commission is not required to take any action this time.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of staff. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of the CDBG & HOME 2024-2025 Annual Action Plan.

Written public comment was received from **Kristy Pontet-Stroop**, Executive Director Alliance for Youth, Inc., via July 16, 2024 email, commented that it is important putting funds aside in the budget to address homelessness/housing issues. Additionally, to allow for a month-to-month or quarterly application process versus an annual application, which will provide flexibility for organizations to apply. Additionally, this would help eliminate some "red tape" that exists when there is a site identified for housing projects.

Written public comment was received from **Shyla Patera**, North Central Independent Living Services, Inc., via July 16, 2024 email, expressed support of community projects focused on single-family housing, universal design and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. Ms. Patera commented that the City needs to focus on ADA sidewalks, curbs, traffic lights, as well as, accessibility for parks and trails.

**Morgan Yeagerlehner**, City resident, Board Member Housed Great Falls, expressed support of CDBG/HOME funds going towards sheltering the unhoused population so that everyone has a safe home and pursuing a quarterly application process.

**Sheila Rice**, City resident, suggested every two months for the application process because three months is a long time for a seller to wait. Ms. Rice further suggested the plan be amended or include community land trust homes with a specific mention because they are the only way to keep the affordable housing stock affordable forever. Also, manufactured housing as an allowable cost and expense because that is the least expensive source of tiny homes. Finally, more funds devoted to sheltering the unhoused population. Ms. Rice explained that Housed Great Falls and the Continuum of Care Ad Hoc Committee have been working to develop a tiny home village. The State of Montana included this project in a \$5 million application to HUD and \$600,000 would be allocated if approved by HUD. CDBG/HOME funds would be necessary to fully fund this project at a minimum of \$1.5 million for 20 tiny homes that would be occupied by prior unsheltered people. Ms. Rice urged the City Commission and Staff to provide the maximum funding possible in this year's annual plan.

**Sarah Justice**, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art Executive Director, explained that the Paris Gibson Square is the only contemporary art museum in Northcentral Montana, offers free admission and is devoted to providing accessibility for all. There is some funding available and support for



# JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

replacing the parking lot; however, the cost is approximately \$500,000. Ms. Justice commented that she would be requesting City support of \$400,000 through the CDBG Grant.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to the CDBG & HOME 2024-2025 Annual Action Plan.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, expressed concern about the City's process of collecting correct Tax Payer Identification numbers for awardees of ARPA funds.

There being no one further to address the Commission, Mayor Reeves closed the CDBG & HOME 2024-2025 Annual Action Plan Needs Hearing.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the City usually receives \$1 million from HUD every year and spending for this year is in line with what the City typically has on an annual basis. Local organizations submitting applications are typically reasonable requests that come in fairly close to that \$1 million threshold and are aware of what the City's limitations are with regard to total funding.

Mayor Reeves inquired if every two months for the application process is a realistic request.

Grant Administrator Hazen responded that he would need input from the Grant Committee, CDBG Administrator Sylvia Tarman and other City staff and would let Ms. Rice know the decision.

Commissioner McKenney expressed appreciation to Grant Administrator Hazen for responding to community pushback about the annual application process and changing it to quarterly.

**21. RESOLUTION 10552, INTENT TO INCREASE PROPERTY TAX.**

**22. RESOLUTION 10551, ANNUAL BUDGET RESOLUTION.**

Mayor Reeves declared the combined public hearing open and asked for presentation of the staff reports.

Finance Director Finance Director Melissa Kinzler reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:

# JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

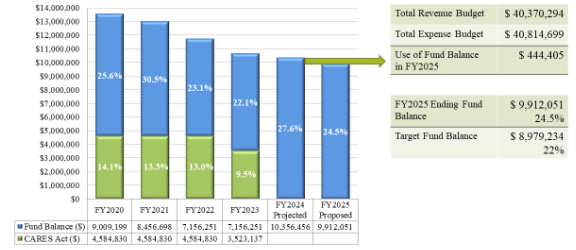
## July 16, 2024

### FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET

July 2, 2024 Work Session



### General Fund Recap



2

### General Fund Revenue Increases

General Fund Revenue Segment	FY2023 Increases	FY2024 Increases	FY2025 Available Increases	Approximate Household Impact
Newly Taxable Property	\$ 352,303	\$ 1,510,213 <small>Protested: Approx. \$1,093,591</small>	\$ 400,000 <small>Amount not known until August</small>	-
Inflationary Factor	\$ 641,691 <small>Used carry-over rolls from prior 2 years</small>	\$ 446,080	\$ 562,520	\$5.76 per \$100,000 Taxable Market Value
Permissive Medical Levy	\$ 247,551	\$ 353,043	\$ 317,544	\$3.25 per \$100,000 Taxable Market Value
Marijuana Tax	-	-	\$ 220,000	-
Entitlement Share	\$ 294,004	\$ 311,446	\$ 319,522	-
<b>Total Revenue Increases</b>	<b>\$ 1,535,549</b>	<b>\$ 2,620,782</b>	<b>\$ 1,819,586</b>	-

3

### General Fund Tax Increases

Increased Revenue from Tax Increases	FY2025 Increase	Details
Inflationary Factor	\$ 562,520	Public Safety Expense Increases: \$1,364,961 (74%) Administration Expense Increases: \$212,907 (12%) Park & Rec Expense Increases: \$8,923 (0.005%) Subsidy to Civic Center Events: \$134,000 (7%) Subsidy to Ann High Big Sky: \$122,407 (7%) Total General Fund Expense Increases: \$1,843,198
Permissive Medical Levy	\$ 317,544	- Directly covers General Fund health insurance increases - Per collective bargaining agreements. City portion is 85% - Health Insurance expense increase for public safety \$311,468
Total Revenue from Tax Increases	\$880,064	- \$9.01 annually for \$100,000 market value home - \$27.03 annually for \$300,000 market value home - \$54.06 annually for \$600,000 market value home

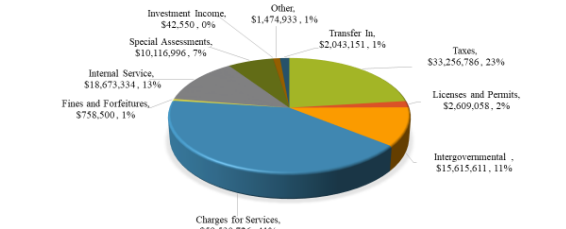
4

### City-Wide Revenues

Revenues	FY2024 Adopted	FY2025 Proposed	Increase (Decrease)	% Change
Taxes	\$ 30,171,096	\$ 33,256,786	\$ 3,085,690	10.23%
Licenses and Permits	\$ 2,434,108	\$ 2,609,058	\$ 174,950	7.19%
Intergovernmental	\$ 26,585,268	\$ 15,615,611	\$(10,969,657)	-41.26%
Charges for Services	\$ 53,524,601	\$ 59,530,726	\$ 6,006,125	11.22%
Fines and Forfeitures	\$ 758,500	\$ 758,500	\$ -	0.00%
Internal Service	\$ 17,406,667	\$ 18,673,334	\$ 1,266,667	7.28%
Special Assessments	\$ 9,487,697	\$ 10,116,996	\$ 629,299	6.63%
Investment Income	\$ 28,150	\$ 42,550	\$ 14,400	51.15%
Other	\$ 643,282	\$ 1,474,933	\$ 831,651	129.28%
Transfer In	\$ 1,786,950	\$ 2,043,151	\$ 256,201	14.34%
Issuance of Debt	\$ 1,500,000	\$ -	\$(1,500,000)	-100.00%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 144,326,319</b>	<b>\$ 144,121,645</b>	<b>\$(204,674)</b>	<b>-0.14%</b>

5

### City-Wide Revenues



6

### Proposed Assessment and Utility Rate Adjustments

		FY2025 Adjustment	Previous Adjustment
Assessment	Boulevard District	6%	2024: 6%
Assessment	Portage Meadows	5%	2024: 5%
Assessment	Street Maintenance	10%	2024: 10%
Assessment	Street Lighting Districts	6.7%	2024: 14%
Utility	Water	Spring 2025: 10%	Spring 2024: 15%
Utility	Sewer	Spring 2025: 15%	Spring 2024: 10%
Utility	Storm Drain	Spring 2025: 10%	Spring 2024: 15%
Utility	Sanitation	Spring 2025: 5%	Spring 2024: 5%

All proposed adjustments require separate Commission action

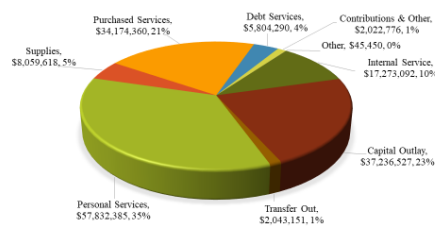
7

### City-Wide Expenses

Expenses	FY2024 Adopted	FY2025 Proposed	Increase (Decrease)	% Change
Personal Services	\$ 53,911,310	\$ 57,832,385	\$ 3,921,075	7.27%
Supplies	\$ 7,151,060	\$ 8,059,618	\$ 908,558	12.71%
Purchased Services	\$ 32,230,860	\$ 34,174,360	\$ 1,943,500	6.03%
Debt Services	\$ 6,044,925	\$ 5,804,290	\$(240,635)	-3.98%
Contributions & Other	\$ 3,565,133	\$ 2,022,776	\$(1,542,357)	-43.26%
Other	\$ 20,450	\$ 45,450	\$ 25,000	122.25%
Internal Service	\$ 16,199,136	\$ 17,273,092	\$ 1,073,956	6.63%
Capital Outlay	\$ 41,542,893	\$ 37,236,527	\$(4,306,366)	-10.37%
Transfer Out	\$ 1,786,950	\$ 2,043,151	\$ 256,201	14.34%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 162,452,717</b>	<b>\$ 164,491,649</b>	<b>\$ 2,038,932</b>	<b>1.26%</b>

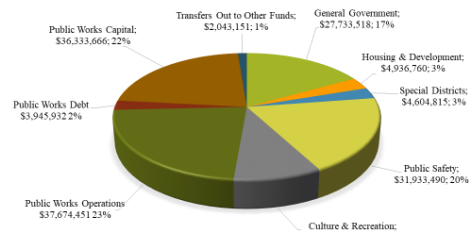
8

### City-Wide Expenses by Category



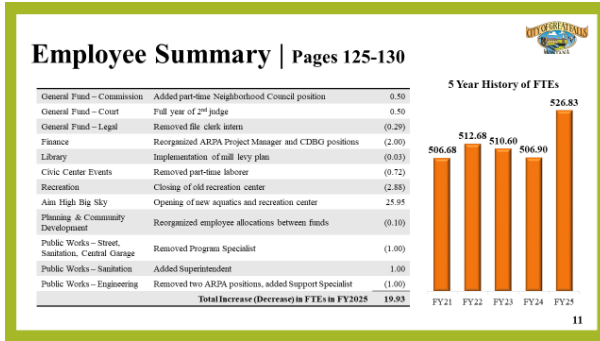
9

### City-Wide Expenses by Function



10

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**  
**July 16, 2024**



**Upcoming Budget Process**

- **June 18<sup>th</sup>**
  - Work Session - presentation of General Fund
- **July 2<sup>nd</sup> – Commission Action**
  - Work Session – full budget presentation
  - Commission sets public hearing for July 16<sup>th</sup>
- **Additional budget work sessions?**
- **July 16<sup>th</sup> – Commission Action**
  - Public Hearing and Adopt or Continue Budget
- **August 20<sup>th</sup> – Commission Action**
  - Adopt Annual Tax Levy

12

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of staff.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of Resolution 10552.

**Michael Yeagerlehner**, City resident, commented that he does not mind paying the marginal increase in property taxes for services he likes having done.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to Resolution 10552.

Written comments were received from the following **Jeni Dodd**, City resident, via July 16, 2024 email and **Sharon Thompson**, City resident, via July 16, 2024 email.

**Sharon Thompson**, City resident, commented that she and her husband live on a fixed income and cannot afford to continue paying higher property taxes. Since moving here in 2005, there have been many increases in their property taxes and if the City continues raising them, she and her husband will sell their house and move to another City that is reasonable in its taxes.

**Jim Thompson**, City resident, expressed concern about Benefis Health Care and Calumet Montana Refining not pay their share of property taxes. Mr. Thompson commented that having public restrooms downtown would create more health, crime and homelessness issues and be the taxpayers responsibility.

**Ben Forsyth**, City resident, commented that issues caused from marijuana use directly relates to property tax increases.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, referred to a 2018 article that stated Great Falls was hit hardest by extreme poverty in the State. Ms. Dodd commented that there has been a decline in employment, 15% of residents are below the poverty level and Great Falls' annual GDP growth has been below the state and national level since 2010. The City needs to decrease its spending instead of increasing taxes because it is becoming unaffordable, especially for those on fixed incomes.

**John Hubbard**, City resident, commented that the City is overtaxing its citizens. He suggested that the State give Great Falls the \$303 million dollars from the marijuana tax.

**Keith Duncan**, City resident, explained that the City Commission was elected to be stewards of the peoples resources and it is their job to be creative and find other solutions besides either cutting City

## JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

services or increasing property taxes. Mr. Duncan suggested that the Commission consider privatization of some City services, because private businesses can deliver services cheaper and more efficiently than government services.

**Eric Bakely**, City resident, commented that a public access channel would allow another way for the City to share other solutions besides cutting services or increasing property taxes. Mr. Bakely offered his services to the City at no charge.

There being no one further to address the Commission, Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10552 – Intent to Increase Property Tax.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner Wolff commented that property tax bills not only include the City, but also, the School District and other taxing entities. She explained that every City Department is fiscally conservative and resolves its needs in cost saving ways. If the City does not come up with resources to pay for City services, the quality of life in the City will decline.

Commissioner Tryon commented that over the last several months of vetting the budget, he is satisfied that the marginal increase in property taxes is justified and balances out with the communities expectation of City services, especially public safety. Commissioner Tryon suggested that citizens unhappy with the property tax increase contact their local legislators. He explained that the Montana Department of Revenue (DOR) determines property taxes, not the City. The State Legislature can exempt property tax for citizens 65 and older, cut the residential property tax rate, and multiplying factor, eliminate property tax exemptions on large, non-profits, and implement a local option or tourism tax. When costs increase for the City, it cannot raise revenue except by either increasing property taxes or cutting City services. He commented that things the City could do is put back the seven mills of library funding into the general fund; eliminate general subsidies to non-performing enterprise funds in the next budget, retire some Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts and working on the Growth Policy. Commissioner Tryon concluded that he would like to see more input from a larger number of citizens prior to the final budget session.

Commissioner McKenney explained that the total property tax can be higher than the rate of inflation and year after year, local government is receiving less money based on the value of a dollar. A solution in the 1990's was to cap the rate of property tax to the rate of or below inflation.

Commissioner Wilson expressed concern for citizens impacted by the increase in property taxes. She reported that the DOR notified the legislature in November 2022 that they were going to have a problem with raising property values and they needed to do an equalization, which the legislature failed to do. Commissioner Wilson explained that she directly blames the Montana Legislature for the property tax problem and will be voting against Resolution 10552. She commended City staff for their efforts with the wonderful job they did putting together the budget.

# JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

July 16, 2024

Commission Tryon commented that he would rather do the responsible thing by voting for Resolution 10552 and funding the City government at the level it needs to be funded.

Commissioner Wolff added that the budget does not include the departments' above and beyond requests and does not reflect their true expenses.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 4-1 (Commissioner Wilson dissenting).

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of or opposition to Resolution 10551. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10551 – Annual Budget Resolution.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**ORDINANCES/RESOLUTIONS**

**CITY COMMISSION**

**23. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Commissioner Wilson explained that several organizations would be conducting another Point-In-Time Count to receive a more accurate count of unhoused citizens in the community.

Commissioner Wolff announced that Sister Virginia Bartholome, served the community from 1973 to 1996 as a reference librarian for the Great Falls Public Library, passed away at the age of 100. Commissioner Wolff reminded citizens to always pull over and stop for emergency vehicles, no matter what color the stoplight is.

**COMMISSION INITIATIVES.**

**24.**

None.

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**

**July 16, 2024**

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, **Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Mayor Reeves, to adjourn the regular meeting of July 16, 2024, at 9:04 p.m.**

Motion carried 5-0.

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Mayor Cory Reeves

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Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea

**Minutes Approved: August 6, 2024**