

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**  
**November 19, 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, Susan Wilson, and Susan Wolff. Also present were Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, ARPA Project Manager Sylvia Tarman, City Attorney David Dennis, Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

**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.

**PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

1. **Michael Yegerlehner**, 313 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North, commented that House Great Falls cold weather drop in opens tonight. On nights when the temperature gets below 25 degrees or below 32 degrees with inclement weather, First United Methodist Church and a group of volunteers from House Great Falls opens the church from 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. where people can get a free meal, hot coffee, or just a place to sit and rest. They are looking for volunteers to staff the drop in center, cook meals, and distribute extra food items and warm weather gear.

**NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS**

2. **MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

None.

**BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

3. **MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

**Michelle Millard**, Safe Care Provider with the City-County Health Department (CCHD), reported on two programs, Parents as Teachers (PAT) and SafeCare.

The mission of PAT is to promote the optimal early development, learning and health of children by supporting and engaging their parents and caregivers. The four dynamic components to the PAT model is personal visits, group connections, screenings and community resource network. The CCHD has been implementing the PAT model in Cascade County since 2007 and are currently serving 72 families.

The mission of SafeCare is to ensure all children have a nurturing, safe and healthy home environment through SafeCare training, implementation, support and research. SafeCare providers

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work with families in their homes to improve parent skills in three areas: parent-child interaction, child healthcare and home safety. CCHD has been implementing the SafeCare model since 2014 and are currently serving 26 families.

**Abigail Hill**, Health Officer with the City County Health Department, provided an update on the salmonella outbreak. Salmonella is a bacteria that is spread through consuming contaminated food or water. It can be spread by someone who is sick and handling food or through animals and pets. Symptoms of salmonella typically start six to 72 hours after consuming contaminated food, but can start up to seven days. It can be challenging to figure out the source.

The CCHD is statutorily required to investigate communicable diseases. CCHD determined 11 positive cases of salmonella the last two weeks; nine of those cases being within the Great Falls Public Schools. Today, the Montana State lab completed genomic sequencing of three test samples and confirmed the strain matches a 12-state salmonella outbreak. Although it does not indicate the source, but lets the CCHD know that there was most likely produce or some food item that was distributed across the country that Great Falls received because the strains match.

### CITY MANAGER

#### 4. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

City Manager Greg Doyon made the following announcements:

- The City's update to the Growth Policy is well underway with a new website [futuregreatfalls.com](http://futuregreatfalls.com). He encouraged residents to sign up for the email listserve to be notified of future meetings, participate and be active in discussion relating to the growth management plan update.
- Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry received the Emerging Leader of the Year award at the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce 2024 Awards Gala on November 14, 2024.
- David Holt, badge #389, and Adrienne Martinez, badge #390, graduated from the Montana Law Enforcement Academy on November 8, 2024, and will transition into the Field Training Officer Program.
- The City has been exceedingly patient with Alluvion, who has been working with their contractor, to resolve financial challenges associated with the Rocky Mountain Building. Alluvion is trying to achieve some structural adjustments to stabilize the top floor and then put on a roof. Their hope is to stabilize it enough to make it marketable to sell. In the meantime, the City has been getting complaints about the container on the sidewalk. The City has asked Alluvion to remove the container, but the sidewalk will need to be closed for a period of time until they can resolve the structural issues and make sure it is safe for the public. A press release is forthcoming.

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- The Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) provided recommendations coming out of the failed public safety levy. Updates will be regularly shared with the Commission and community.

Police Chief Jeff Newton reported that during fall of 2023, the voters of Great Falls chose not to approve the public safety mill levy and bond request. Since then, the members of the Great Falls Police Department have continued to provide the best service to the community members within their capacity to do so. Despite the failure of the public safety levy and bond, the workload has not subsided and the challenges have not gone away. The Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) continues to review their processes and prioritizes their response posture, both in the patrol and investigations bureaus. GFPD's public safety needs have not changed since the levy vote and the expectations from the community have not subsided.

Currently, GFPD has seven sworn officer vacancies and six 911 Center vacancies. He is anticipating two to three retirements from sworn personnel and one resignation from the 911 Center during the 2025 calendar year. GFPD has held two vacancies in its Investigations Bureau for over a year (one (1) General Case and one (1) Russell Country Drug Task Force) due to the inability to backfill those assignments.

GFPD continues to recruit both sworn officer and 911 Center applicants. GFPD has streamlined its hiring processes for a smoother transition between the application process and conditional offer of employment. However, GFPD will not supersede hiring standards even though they are short staffed in both areas.

GFPD continues to hire those applicants that meet the necessary qualifications. However, GFPD is challenged by limited slots available at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy for entry-level hires. This means their ability to hire is predicated upon the number of reserved training slots allowed to GFPD by the Montana Law Enforcement Academy.

The Patrol Bureau is averaging 115 calls for service per day, which equates to nearly five calls per hour, with an average of 14 officers on duty during a 24-hour time period. He noted that many of these calls for service require multiple officers on scene. Depending on the nature of the call, every officer on duty may be dispatched to one incident. It is not uncommon for the Patrol Bureau to make 30 to 40 arrests in a week. Because of the staffing levels and call load, this places the Patrol Bureau in a reactive, not a proactive, policing model.

The Special Victims Unit, which investigates sex crimes against children and adults and children victimized, so far this year have 230 assigned cases. The General Case Unit has had 106 assigned cases, and the School Resource Officers (SRO) average 100 calls for service per week. Because of the workload with the SRO's, he had to make an internal staffing change and assign a Sergeant to only supervise that specific group of investigators. Chief Newton further noted that the SRO Supervisor also responds to calls to assist her team.

To date, the Russell Country Drug Task Force, which the GFPD is the parent agency and has investigators assigned to, has seized 111 pounds of methamphetamine, ¼ pound of fentanyl powder, 37,370 fentanyl pills and 4.5 pounds of cocaine.

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Regarding the 911 Center, to date, they have handled 73,304 calls for service. The 911 Center provides service to the Great Falls Police Department, Cascade County Sheriff's Office, Great Falls Fire Rescue, Great Falls EMS, and Rural Fire. Over the last week, the 911 Center has handled 1,467 calls for service, with an average of 251 calls per service per day, in a 24-hour timeframe. Due to staffing shortages, the workload is being handled by six dispatchers over that 24-hour time period.

GFPD continues to rely heavily on limited availability of grants and the Great Falls Police Community Foundation to assist GFPD in acquiring needed equipment and training for staff due to budgetary constraints.

Achievements include Kelly Johanneck being recently appointed as the Deputy Director at the 911 Center. This was a newly created position that will benefit the operations at the center and service to the community.

The Evidence Expansion project, funded through ARPA, is on schedule and has been shut down for the winter months. They anticipate the project resuming construction in early March 2025, with a completion date tentatively scheduled for November 2025.

The Front Counter project, funded by a State and Local Infrastructure Partnership Act (SLIPA) grant, is on schedule, with the bid opening process starting on November 20, 2025. These two projects have been sought after for years, and both are coming to fruition.

Chief Newton concluded that he is extremely proud of the team at the GFPD, and they will continue to provide the best service that they can within their capacity to do so. He appreciates the support of the Mayor, Commissioners, City staff and many of our community members.

Manager Doyon added that the City retained the safetyinthefalls website. The City's communication specialist will start updating that website with these updates from the departments, and additional information as it becomes available.

Commissioner McKenney applauded Chief Newton for his attitude on hiring. Even though the Department has been shorthanded for many years, he always wants to hire folks that are going to be an asset to the organization.

Commissioner Wolff expressed appreciation for GFPD's professionalism and compassion that the officers show in difficult circumstances on a daily basis.

### **CONSENT AGENDA.**

5. Minutes, November 6, 2024, City Commission Meeting.
6. Total Expenditures of \$3,076,849 for the period of October 17, 2024 through November 6, 2024, to include claims over \$25,000, in the amount of \$2,205,230.
7. Contracts List.
8. Grants List.

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

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**OLD BUSINESS**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**9. PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AGREEMENT AMENDMENT NO. 1 FOR THE OPTIMAL CORROSION CONTROL TREATMENT PLAN. OF 1527.8**

Public Works Director Chris Gaub reported that the Water Treatment Plant prides itself on operating within the required standards for public drinking water. This includes collecting, testing and reporting of test results of both the raw water from the Missouri River and the finished, treated water that is distributed throughout the City. Prior to 2023, the finished water had very little impact to lead and copper lines throughout the City. The water fell within the requirements of the optimized corrosion control in the EPA's lead and copper rule.

Following a spring snowmelt in 2023, the composition of the Missouri River was altered enough to make the finished water slightly corrosive. This caused samples collected from individual homes in the City to exceed the trigger level of ten parts per billion for lead, which, under the lead and copper rule, triggered a corrosion study to develop an improvement strategy. Because of known hazards posed by lead plumbing to include lead service lines, DEQ is requiring this corrosion control project to add an additional layer of defense against the erosion of plumbing materials that could potentially cause the presence of lead at the taps.

The project will include the addition of orthophosphate and sodium hydroxide at the Water Treatment Plant to adjust the pH or corrosive nature of the finished water. According to the EPA, this strategy will prevent lead from leaching into the water from plumbing and fixtures. Orthophosphate is a food grade additive considered safe by the US Food and Drug Administration. Sodium hydroxide is a base commonly used in the water treatment process to increase the pH of water and reduce corrosion of piping.

Staff recommends the Commission approve the amendment to allow Morrison-Maierle to begin designing the components that will enable the City to implement the corrosion control strategy mandated by DEQ and by the DEQ deadline of May 2026.

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**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission approve the Professional Services Agreement Amendment No. 1 in the amount of \$185,375 to Morrison-Maierle, for the Optimum Corrosion Control Treatment Plan project, and authorize the City Manager to execute the agreement documents.**

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 Wilson noted she used to do this for a living. It is a good package that Morrison-Maierle put together and it is required.

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

Motion carried 5-0.

**10. CIVIC CENTER COURT RELOCATION PROJECT. OF 1750.3**

ARPA Project Manager Sylvia Tarman reported that the Civic Center Court Relocation project includes renovating the Missouri Room to make room for two new courtrooms and office space for the Court staff. A construction contract was awarded for the project in March 2024, and work began in July. City staff have been working with the architect to review IT needs for the Court. Central Technologies has proposed to install data cabling and connectivity features throughout the new Court footprint. Upon review of the proposal and needs of the court space, City staff is confident that this proposal will provide adequate access and connectivity to enable efficient operations for the Courts.

Therefore, City staff recommends awarding this contract to Central Technologies, Inc., in the amount of \$27,295.00, as part of the City Court Relocation Project, utilizing ARPA funds. This puts the overall project budget, under contract so far, at \$2,939,483.56.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission award a contract in the amount of \$27,295 to Central Technologies, Inc. for the Civic Center Court Relocation project utilizing American Rescue Plan Act funds, and authorize the City Manager to execute the contract documents.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Commissioners. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

**11. TERMINATION OF THE APRIL 20, 1993 AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS AND THE GREAT FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY TRUSTEES.**

City Attorney David Dennis reported that, since April 20, 1993, the Great Falls Public Library has been operating under a management agreement with the City entered into by the City Commission and the Great Falls Public Library trustees. The 1993 agreement automatically renews every year

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unless one party gives 90-days advance notice of termination. The agreement has been automatically renewed without change for 31 years.

At the City Commission's February 20, 2024 meeting, the Commission acknowledged that the 1993 agreement was outdated and could benefit from a review. The Commission agreed by consensus to make a formal request to the Library Board of Trustees to open the current one-year agreement for discussion. On April 25, 2024, representatives from the Great Falls City Commission and the Library Board of Trustees began meeting to review the current agreement. On November 4, 2024, the parties completed their discussions with a final proposal made by the City representatives, which will be the next item on tonight's agenda.

As mentioned, the current agreement requires 90-days advance notice of termination. This notice is from the anniversary date of the agreement. While the term of the agreement renews on July 1 every year, the signature date of the original agreement was April 20, 1993. Therefore, arguably, the anniversary date for the current agreement is April 20, 2025, and notice must be given to terminate the agreement by January 20, 2025, or the agreement will extend for another year.

Since the parties' discussions have ended and the City representatives have arrived at a final proposed agreement, which will still have to be approved by the Library Board of Trustees, it is appropriate for the Commission to provide notice now that the 1993 agreement is to be terminated with a deadline to do so just nine weeks away. As mentioned, the next item on the agenda tonight will be consideration of the agreement that was proposed by the City team to the Library.

**Pursuant to Item #8 of the Agreement between the City of Great Falls and the Great Falls Public Library Trustees, Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner McKenney, that the City Commission direct the City Manager to give formal written notification to the Great Falls Library Trustees that the Agreement dated April 20, 1993 will be terminated effective June 30, 2025.**

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

**Aaron Weissman**, City resident, commented that he had the honor of serving as the vice-chair of the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) that the Commission convened this summer. He commented it is the wrong decision to take money from the Library for the ostensible reason to fund public safety needs. Public safety is a real unmet need. The Prosecutors' Office and the Court need a few clerks in order to operate with some efficiency. The Fire Department is underfunded to the point Great Falls needs two new fire stations and enough firemen to staff them. The Police Department is operating out of what was an old warehouse and only has enough staff to have a few officers on the street for some shifts. None of this is okay. He opined the money that would be taken from the Library today would not be enough to make a dent in the City's need for more firefighters, police officers, or equipment, but it will result in decreasing popular programming at the Library.

He encouraged the Commission to review the minutes of the PSAC proceedings regarding their discussion about Library funding, to use the \$350,000 that was already returned to fund the clerks needed by the Courts and the Prosecutors' Office, to start charging developers for the increased Fire

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Department needs whenever City boundaries are expanded, and to vote “no” to rescind the 1993 Library agreement and against taking any additional funds from the Library.

**Sara Buley**, City resident, inquired why a public safety levy was not put out many years before when all the problems began instead of now when it is in a horrific situation. She thinks taking funds from the Library is a wrong idea.

**Erin Merchant**, City resident, commented that she and her husband own several small businesses in Great Falls and multiple properties. They love this community, which is why they supported both recent levies for the Library and Public Safety. These decisions impacted their finances, but found them worth every penny because they believe in fostering a community where their children, friends, and neighbors have access to essential services.

She suggested that this decision is neither creative nor constructive, but punitive. It is a targeted response because a levy vote did not go the way the City hoped. That is not leadership. This choice demonstrates a profound lack of accountability for how the Commission’s actions today will ripple through the future. The precedent the Commission will be setting by pulling these mills is a dangerous one. It diminishes the trust the voters have in the Commission. It jeopardizes the success of future levies, and it undermines the very foundation of democracy, a system built on respecting the will of the people.

**Brianne Laurin**, City resident and Executive Director of the Great Falls Public Library Foundation, expressed deep disappointment and sincere sadness regarding tonight's vote to reduce the Library's funding from 7 mills to 3.5 mills over the next four fiscal years. Library supporters are your neighbors, your families, and your students, seniors, veterans, and business owners who made their voices heard at the ballot box in June of 2023. When 52% of Great Falls voters approved additional Library funding, they demonstrated that the Library is a public priority. Libraries are fundamental infrastructure for an educated, informed, and economically vibrant community.

The decision tonight undermines the clear mandate from the community who voted to increase the Library funding through a 15-mill levy. The voters approved enhanced Library services, not replacement funding. By reducing the existing agreement by over \$420,000 annually, the Library will face certain cuts to staffing hours that were just expanded and essential community programs. From a fundraising perspective, this creates significant challenges. Donors give to enhance and grow Library services, not to backfill basic operational funding.

When government support diminishes, it becomes increasingly difficult to inspire philanthropic giving. Donors question why they should contribute when their tax dollars specifically allocated for Library services through their votes are being redirected elsewhere. The Foundation exists to supplement and enhance Library services, not to replace the core funding. This reduction in City support will inevitably impact the Foundation’s ability to raise funds for innovative programs, special events, and capital improvements that the community deserves.

Public safety, infrastructure, and responsive government are indeed crucial priorities, and the Library actively supports all three. The Library provides safe spaces for youth after school, access to technology and information that drives economic opportunity, and transparent services that respond directly to community needs.



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Ms. Laurin urged the Commission to honor the spirit of the community's vote and maintain the Library's foundational funding of 7 mills by agreement. If that is not possible today, she urged the Commission to approve the renegotiation at 3.5 mills and not to terminate the agreement in whole.

**Shirley Schermele**, City resident, commented she is a retired teacher. She comes before the Commission with a heavy heart and a deep sense of disappointment for the community and the generations that will come after her. As a teacher, she knows the value of knowledge and access. The Library is not just a building filled with books. It is a cornerstone of the community. It is a place where children discover the joy of reading, where students find the resources they need to succeed, and where adults, young and old, learn, grow, and connect. To gut the Library's funding after voters just approved a levy is not only disheartening, but a betrayal of public trust and sets a dangerous precedent.

Ms. Schermele concluded that this decision would have its consequences. The Commission is not just trimming a budget, but eliminating opportunities and dreams and the future of Great Falls. She urged the Commission to reconsider, and to listen to the voters who have placed their faith in the Commission to uphold their decisions.

**Charlie Parker**, City resident, commented that libraries have long been bastions of education and free thought. They stand as a testament to human knowledge and as a monument to the apolitical human achievement of holding several differing ideas in one place safely and respectfully. Although he can somewhat understand the Commission's decision of cutting part of the funding for public safety, he urged the Commission to hold the Library in their hearts because, not only does it provide education for numerous people, it is a safe place for people to warm up and access the internet to apply for jobs that they wouldn't otherwise be able to apply for.

**Carrie Parker**, City resident, agrees with Aaron Weissman that this is a false choice. They should not have to choose between the Library and public safety. As an educator, as someone who works with people experiencing poverty and homelessness, and perhaps most especially as a mom, she knows firsthand what happens when children are exposed to books, especially at an early age. She also knows what happens when they are not. Kids who read more are smarter. They have greater reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general knowledge. Minimizing support to the Library does not bode well for test scores down the road, and she wants kids in Great Falls to have all of the advantages of kids in other places. At a time when national measurements of IQ are showing dismal results, when kids grow up with their noses buried in a device, when TikTok replaces Dr. Seuss, money should not be taken away from the Library.

As someone who works closely also with the downtown population, those experiencing poverty, and those who are unhoused, she cannot emphasize enough how important the Library is. It provides access to computers so folks can get jobs, connects people to services, and is a component of the continuum of care.

**Tony Rosales**, Chair of the Cascade County Libertarian Party, commented that the party stands in support of terminating this agreement. He was also a member of the PSAC that discussed this issue. He came out of that with a much different perspective or point of view than Aaron Weissman. As a Libertarian, one of their more common adages is that taxation is theft, and that is true here today. He also thinks the community conversation of public safety versus the Library is a false one.

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Ultimately, the community is trying to debate the use of extorted money. It is not the Commission's money, it is not the Library's money, and it is not public safety money. It is the people's money. The Commission should respect that. Currently, property taxes in Montana are a substantial issue, and that is something that needs to be addressed at the state and local levels.

Mr. Rosales is in support of terminating this agreement and giving that money back to the people to decide on an individual basis where they want to spend their money – Library, public safety, or to cover their property tax bills.

**Talan Harrington**, City resident, commented that this topic would not be before the Commission for discussion if the public safety levy had passed. He suggested a smaller public safety levy that the public would consider voting for. If the Commission takes the 3.5 mills from the Library, he commented that he would not vote for any other levies and it does not matter what it is for.

**Matt Pipinich**, City resident, expressed appreciation to Mayor Reeves for taking the agreement back to the drawing board. He appreciates that, when new information is presented, it is good to go back and take a second look. He echoed the comments of Aaron Weissman, Erin Schermele and Carrie Parker. The Library has been a great resource to him as a citizen and as a business owner. He does not think the City can afford to lose trust and resources in this community when the community has so little as it is right now.

**Helena Lovick**, City resident, appreciated the comments in favor of the Library and against terminating the 1993 agreement. She commented that the Library is not just costing the taxpayers, it is saving them money and giving people opportunities, regardless of their backgrounds. She urged the Commission to support the Library and not terminate the 1993 agreement.

**Michael Yegerlehner**, City resident, commented that the Library is a public institution and the Commission is about to gut his institution. For a lot of people, the Library is critical. To him, this feels underhanded and is frustrating.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, commented that she was also a member of the PSAC. She is asking the Commission to terminate the 1993 agreement with the Library. The Library should get no mills from the City's general fund. It is a slap to the face of taxpayers that the City negotiating team entered back into negotiations after the Library rejected the City's last, best, final offer. The Library Director now claims that the 2023 levy ask amount was based in part on those 7 mills remaining in place. The 1993 agreement for the 7 mills was never guaranteed in perpetuity, but the Library based their 2023 levy ask on that assumption. Ms. Dodd opined that it was idiotic to structure a levy based on an agreement that could be canceled annually by either party. Further, the 7-mill agreement was not in the ballot language, it was not in the ordinance for changing the City Charter, and it was not in the resolution for the levy. Most voters did not know that the 7 mills by agreement existed.

The Commission took a second look to perhaps allocate the 7 mills to public safety needs. Public safety, unlike the Library, benefits everyone in Great Falls and, unlike the Library, is a necessary function of government to the people. The 2023 levy alone more than doubled the Library's pre-levy budget from 2 voted on mills to up to 17 mills. The Library is also getting hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the levy ask because of the increased value of a mill.

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Ms. Dodd concluded that the Commission and City officials acted irresponsibly when they did not prioritize the public safety levy over the Library levy to begin with and put it on the ballot first. It is simply unconscionable to her that this City would place the Library, which is a non-necessity, above basic human needs of safety and security. She urged the Commission to eliminate the 1993 agreement and to not offer the Library any general fund money.

**Andrew Wright**, City resident, commented what brought us here is the process of the City kicking the can down the road. The City cannot have a tradeoff between public safety and the Library. The amount of the mills from the Library are negligible when it comes to public safety. To terminate this agreement is wrong.

**Colleen Stewart**, City resident, commented that less than 12% of the voters in Great Falls voted for the Library levy, and it was the only thing that was voted on. She believes it was planned for June of 2023, because that is the time of the lowest voter turnout. She agrees with terminating the 1993 agreement. She concluded that this is not about losing our Library.

**Kathie Hansen**, County resident, agreed with prior speakers to terminate the 1993 agreement. She does not believe the Commission should have agreed to put the Library levy on the ballot before the public safety levy. She wants a Library that is designed for education of people who are going there to learn, to look at factual material that will help them to learn, grow and prosper, not just people who have decided that it is a good place to go to keep warm or to not have to follow the rest of society's rules. She urged the Commission to terminate the 1993 agreement, and to allow the money to go back to the public to decide how they want to take care of the community.

**Millie Whalen**, County resident and owner of Cassiopeia Books in Great Falls, commented that she has been incredibly proud to work with the Library on book and author events. Libraries are important, critical institutions to the life of a city. They are places where people go to read, learn, think, and to grow. She urged the Commission to not terminate the 1993 agreement. The City knew in advance that its annual contributions were part of the Library's mill levy calculations. Elections used to matter and have consequences. She urged the Commission to respect the voters' decision. The Library won the mill levy, and it used the money in the way it said it would. She suggested talking with the neighborhood councils and public to figure out why the public safety levy failed, and what can be done to come up with more money for public safety. If the Commission wants to restore trust in the community, she suggested leaving the Library with the money that it has, accept their offer to take 2.5 mills back, and make a real commitment to the taxpayers about where the money is going to be spent.

**Gerry Jennings**, City resident, questioned where is the justice when the Commission is trying to take a Library away from a City. People enter the Library with the idea that they can utilize the free services of the Library. She referred to demeaning comments made against the Library Director and Board and noted that is not the way to treat people. They have done a marvelous job of providing City services to the City of Great Falls. She would not have come to Great Falls 50 years ago if she heard that the Library was under this kind of indictment, because there are plenty of communities in the United States that support their public library and their schools. She urged the Commission to not terminate the 1993 agreement.

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**Jason Olthoff**, City resident, commented that the 1993 agreement was not anything that was voted on. He did not hear about the 7 mills until last year. During the Library levy all that was talked about was the 2 mills, adding the 15 mills, and returning the \$350,000. His kids were homeschooled and his wife took their kids to the Library often and still uses it today. This is not about closing down the Library or shutting down anything. It is dealing with an agreement that has a 90-day termination notice. He is in support of the Commission terminating the 1993 agreement, and then dealing with Item 12.

**Jane Weber**, City resident, commented that when the levy was presented by the Library Board, the mills from the 1993 agreement were clearly stated and not hidden. She also commented that the comments are false about the timing of the election being a time when there was low voting. The timing of this levy for the Library was intentional, not because there would be low voter turnout, but because it was essential to have a continuous flow of funding to keep the Library services going. She encouraged the Commission to not terminate the 1993 agreement.

**Kim McKeehan**, City resident, commented she is a member of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. She expressed gratitude for the work that Director McIntyre has done, and to Mayor Reeves for bringing this all back together. The indigenous people that are going to the Library, need that Library. Great Falls needs places where kids can go and feel like they have somebody to talk to and somebody that believes in them and to have access to some kind of resources.

**Pat Ruf**, City resident, commented that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The Commission has been greasing this same wheel every meeting he has been to for the last two years, while the rest of the machine is breaking down. Public safety is a dire issue in this town. He suggested the Commission vote yes to get rid of all 7 mills for the Library and put it toward public safety where it belongs.

There being no one further to address the Commission, Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner Tryon thanked Commissioners McKenney and Wolff for their work on the discussions with the Library Board over the last several months. The 1993 agreement was well past time to be looked at, reviewed and to be updated. There were several things beyond the 7-mill funding that needed to be updated and improved in that agreement. The 7-mill funding in that agreement 31 years ago was approved only by the City Commission in the consent agenda, and was not voted on mills. That agreement did not get the scrutiny or the public vetting that is going on now and that has been going on for several months. The voted on mills included the 2 mills in the City Charter and the more recently approved 15-mill levy. He will be voting to cancel this agreement and then move on to the next step.

Commissioner Wolff commented that she would be voting to cancel this agreement only because of what the Commission will be discussing during the next agenda item. She thanked everyone that participated in the discussions. She wanted to review and renew an agreement for the Library into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Things have changed a lot since 1993.

Commissioner McKenney noted he would be voting in favor of terminating this agreement, and would save his remarks for the next item.

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Commissioner Wilson inquired why this item was placed on the agenda before Item 12. She will be voting no because she would rather terminate an agreement after some sort of agreement has been made.

In response to Mayor Reeves, City Clerk Lisa Kunz restated the motion on the floor, as follows:

Pursuant to Item #8 of the Agreement between the City of Great Falls and the Great Falls Public Library Trustees, Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner McKenney, to direct the City Manager to give formal written notification to the Great Falls Library Trustees that the Agreement dated April 20, 1993 will be terminated effective June 30, 2025.

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

Motion carried 4-1 (Commissioner Wilson dissenting).

12. **2024 MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE GREAT FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR SERVICES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT THROUGH JUNE 30, 2029.**

Commissioner McKenney reported that since 1993 the Library has contracted with the City to provide personnel, human resources, accounting, and other services to the Library, pursuant to a one-year agreement, which was automatically extended every year for 31 years. The can kept being kicked down the road. The City agreed to contribute from its general fund an amount equivalent to 7 mills. This funding is in addition to the 2 mills that the Library has historically received pursuant to the City Charter, which is separately assessed on behalf of the Library.

On June 6, 2023, Great Falls voters approved a City Charter Amendment to increase the amount of funding from 2 mills to up to 17 mills. This funding is separately assessed to property owners to fund Library services, and is wholly independent of the funds provided by the City under the 1993 Agreement.

At the meeting on February 20, 2024, the Commission agreed by consensus to explore with the Library Trustees, a discussion of the 1993 Agreement, which is outdated and in need of review. City representatives involved in the discussion consisted of City Commissioners Joe McKenney and Susan Wolff. City Attorney David Dennis and City Manager Greg Doyon provided administrative support. The Great Falls Public Library retained Bill Bronson as Legal Counsel. Whitney Olsen, Chair of the Trustees and appointed County representative, Anne Bulger, Trustee and City appointee, and Library Director Susie McIntyre participated on behalf of the Library.

The highlights of the proposed agreement include:

- Funding – 7 mills for Fiscal Year 2025, and 3½ mills for Fiscal Years 2026, 2027, 2028 and 2029.
- Term - Unlike the rolling one-year term of the 1993 agreement, the term of the new Agreement shall begin on the date it is approved by the Great Falls City Commission and

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terminates on June 30, 2029. The Agreement may be extended by the will of a future City Commission and future Board of Directors of the Library, for successive one-year renewal terms.

- Chain of Command – The City Commission appoints the Library Board members and sets the budget. The Library Board sets Library policy, and hires and oversees the Library Director.

Commissioner Wolff added that there were a lot of difficult discussions as they went through this agreement. She clarified that, even though this is a five-year agreement, future Commissions and future Library Board could ask to have this agreement reviewed at any time.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of Commissioners McKenney or Wolff.

Commissioner Tryon requested clarification about whether the City Commission or Library Board had the option to renew yearly, or at any time.

Commissioner McKenney responded that if a majority of the members of the City Commission and Library Board agreed, the agreement could be renegotiated at any time.

City Attorney David Dennis clarified that, because the agreement has not been approved yet by the Library Board, paragraph 7 of the proposed agreement will be amended to read that the term of the agreement shall begin on the date it is approved by all parties and will end on June 30, 2029.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner McKenney moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission approve the 2024 Management Agreement between the City of Great Falls and the Board of Trustees of the Great Falls Public Library for services and financial support through June 30, 2029.**

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

**Talan Harrington**, City resident, suggested the motion be amended to provide 7 mills to the Library for the five-year term.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, commented that those 7 mills were not voted on mills. She referred to an article in *The Electric* quoting Library Director McIntyre that, “the reduction of mills in the proposed management agreement represents about half of the Library levy dollars.” Ms. Dodd commented that was incorrect and meant to confuse the public. The proposed agreement would reduce the mills from the general fund to the Library and has nothing to do with the Library levy voted on mills. Ms. Dodd commented that most of the voters did not know about the 7 mills by agreement. She suggested the Commission proceed with caution and not reward the Library with continued general fund mills. It would also be an act of total irresponsibility at this point for current Commissioners to approve an agreement that would tie the hands of a future seated Commission for the next four years when the original agreement was subject to non-renewal each year by the

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Commission. She also opined that the public was not made aware of the negotiating meetings between the City and the Library in violation of Montana's open meeting laws. She will be pursuing that matter, as well as where in the Montana Code Annotated does it allow an agreement between a City and public Library for funding that isn't voted on by the people.

Ms. Dodd asked the Commission to reject this agreement and to refuse to fund the Library with any mills from the City's general fund. She further called for the resignation of the Library Director for incompetence and spreading misinformation.

**Susie McIntyre**, Library Director, clarified that the Library was funded by the City before the levy. She believes that the community understood that the Library had existing funding and was asking for additional funding. When the levy was put in front of the community, there was no place on the ballot to list existing funding. The ballot language was created by the City Attorney's Office. The existing Library funding was provided in every presentation to the community. For fiscal year 2026, she estimates that the 15 mills will bring in approximately \$1.8 million dollars. She concluded that, basically, the taxpayers are paying about \$1.8 million dollars more. About \$1.1 million will come to the Library and about \$700,000 will be reallocated to other priorities. The Library entered into negotiations in good faith and she hopes that the Commission approves the agreement because she thinks it is the best one that they can agree on.

**Millie Whalen**, County resident, inquired and received clarification that it would take a majority of both the City Commission and Library Board to re-open negotiations.

**Jane Weber**, City resident, agreed with Commissioner Wilson's comments that right now, all 7 mills are gone until an action is taken on this item. After the five years are up, she foresees that this body will not renew the agreement and the 3.5 mills will go away. She agreed with a prior speaker to restore the 7 mills for five years to allow the Library more time to figure out how they want to make that adjustment, as it will be a hardship for the Library.

**Kathie Hansen**, County resident, commented that she was under the impression that the Library and the City-County Health Department had become independent of the City and County Commissions and rule themselves. If they rule themselves, the tax dollars pay for both of those operations. She thinks the residents should be able to have a better idea and ability of how their tax dollars are spent.

City Attorney David Dennis clarified that it is not true that the 7 mills are gone today. The motion in Item 11 authorized the City Manager to notify the Library that the City intends to terminate the 1993 agreement effective June 30, 2025. In essence, it puts the City and the Library Trustees in a situation where they have an agreement that is ending. It essentially eliminates the automatic renewal provision by giving notice of termination today. It does not diminish any funds being provided to the Library between now and the end of the fiscal year.

**Tony Rosales**, Chair of the Cascade County Libertarian Party, commented that this is the people's money. Give it back.

Written comments in support of the 2024 Management Agreement were received from: **Grayce Holzheimer, Marilyn Schnider and Una Koontz** expressed appreciation to the Commission for

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going back to the drawing board to negotiate a compromise and is in favor of the reduction to 3.5 mills. **Richard Liebert**, County resident, believes a compromise is feasible moving forward, but urged the Commission to insist state legislators fix the radical rise in property taxes, which crippled the public safety levy with “sticker shock.”

Written comments in opposition to the 2024 Management Agreement were received from: **Neighborhood Council 7**, expressed concerns about funding changes for the Library, noting the 7 mill agreement of 1993 has funded the Library and its programs and outreach for over 30 years; **Jeni Dodd**, City resident, expressed opposition to the negotiations that occurred after the City’s last, best and final offer that would have eliminated the 7 mills by agreement general fund subsidy after two years; **Brian Cayko**, City resident, urged the Commission to stop negotiating with the Library. Because of higher property valuations, there was a significant increase in the value of a mill and the Library has realized hundreds of thousands more in revenue from the 2023 levy than it requested it needed from the levy. He urged the Commission to put those 7 mills towards public safety needs; **Donna Williams**, City resident, urged the Commission to restore all 7 mills to the Library and leave the contract the way it was; **Jan Wenaas**, County resident, requested that the Commission consider no funding be allocated to the Library and that the funds be redirected to the City general fund to support public safety; **Ed Tice**, requested the Commission drop the 7 mills for the Library, and to do the right thing and fund public safety; **Gordon Whirry**, City resident, expressed opposition to any attempt to divert public funds committed to the Library for other uses; **Ginny Rigliano**, urged the Commission to redirect the 7 mills from the 1993 Agreement to funding public safety; and **Liz Ambrose**, urged the Commission to continue to work on reallocating the extra mills the Library receives above the ones that were voted on.

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

Commissioner Tryon commented that he appreciates the efforts of everyone involved, and understands and respects that there are differing views on how this should be handled. He does not respect and appreciate the level of acrimony and nasty political rhetoric this issue has devolved into over the past six months. Someone organized an email bombing effort with a group called [actionnetwork.org](http://actionnetwork.org), a far left progressive activist organization. Most of the form emails said the same thing. However, some of the comments directed to him for even suggesting that the 1993 agreement and 7 mills therein be discussed, included calling him a racist, a slimy politician, the old standby, and a fascist. He was told by the Library Director in an email or a statement put out by the Library Board that the City Commission was engaged in a bait and switch. Someone also made a bunch of stickers that were handed out to the public that said, “Don’t rob our readers, hands off the GFPL.” The middle of the sticker depicted what was apparently the City Commission running away with bags of money.

He reminded everyone that the 7 mills in the 1993 agreement does not belong to the Library. He heard it again tonight that the Commission is stealing from the Library. That money belongs to the people. It is taxpayers’ money. To depict and characterize City Commissioners as thieves and robbers, as well as accusing the Commission of engaging in a con game and a bait and switch is beyond the pale.

The Police and Fire Departments asked for a little more than \$950,000 in fiscal year 2025, and were denied because the City does not have capacity in the general fund. After looking at that and into



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the City's future public safety needs, he cannot in good conscience support Library expansion over public safety. The limited resources in the City's general fund is for public safety – police, fire and courts. He cannot justify voting for this agreement which uses those resources to subsidize Library expansion projects, instead of for priority public safety needs. Especially since the Library is now receiving up to 15 mills of additional operational funding on top of the 2 mill in the Charter. This agreement that the Commission is voting on leaves 3.5 mills of general fund money in place for four additional years to subsidize those Library expansion projects and added Library salaries.

The September 2023 Library payroll before the levy passed was \$829,000. The Library pay rate report for September 2024, after the levy passed, is \$1,426,231. Before the levy passed, there were 17 employees. After the levy passed, there are 34 employees. Three of those are unfilled positions. Some of those salaries include about a \$5,000 a year raise for the Library Director. There are two added Library safety specialist positions at \$46,000 each per year. He is not going to be voting to approve this agreement because he thinks that the Commission has much greater needs for the general fund resources than to fund Library expansion projects.

Mayor Reeves commented that he is glad this topic is coming to an end. He will be supporting the agreement. When he first got engaged in this matter, he was in favor of removing all 7 mills. After some robust conversations, he wanted to find a compromise. The 3.5 mills does not make either side happy, but it is a compromise. It is a middle ground for now.

Commissioner McKenney commented he is hopeful this item can be put behind the Commission this evening. If they come to an agreement, it is peace of mind. Of course he supports the Library or he would not have voted to put the Library levy out to a vote. A Library is an asset to the community. But, it is a balancing act for the Commission. When the City Commission is considering budget or policy changes to City services, they listen to concerns and they engage with the departments, the City Manager and the public. They consider the needs of the community, and then the Commission members do what they were elected to do. Make decisions.

The Library Board is appointed by the City Commission. He expects the appointed representatives to have a broad perspective of, not only the needs of the Library, but also other City services. The City Commission representatives had thoughtful discussions with the Library Board representatives. The City Commission has a new proposed written agreement to consider and vote on. The City Commission members have five very different ideas on what this agreement should look like.

Before the levy, the Library was allocated 9 mills. If the new agreement passes, the Library will be allocated 20½ mills. Three main points of the new agreement is that it clarifies administrative duties, it has a termination date, and it makes a reduced funding adjustment. At the same time, it allows for increased Library services and a successful, vibrant Library. He will support this agreement as proposed.

Commissioner Wilson expressed appreciation for the hard work that everybody put into this arduous process. She was in the audience as a private citizen last year when the funding scheme for the Library was worked out. She understood that the \$350,000 allocation was going to be given back to the City, the Library would keep the 7 mills, and the up to 17 mills question would be put out to the voters. It was clear in the media that the 7 mills by agreement was to be kept to be able to fund the Library under their funding scheme that they were promising the voters. To take away anything

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is not respecting the will of the voters. She questioned how the voters could trust the Commission again with another levy vote. Everyone knows that Fire Rescue, Police Department, the Court and the Legal Department are in dire straits. The Commission fails to get everybody to understand that when you live in a village, you support it. It is expensive to run. The voters soundly defeated the public safety levy and bond issue. If you do not want to support the village and you want to move out into the county, it may be cheaper but when you call for help, an EMT out in the county may or may not show up. But here in Great Falls, you will always have somebody show up. This information does relate to the question at hand. Taking away 3½ mills is about 14% of the Library's budget. The Library realized the crunch in the City and offered back 2½ mills. The difference may fund only one additional position in one of those departments. That is it. Commissioner Wilson opined that the Library will probably lose two or three positions, and will close on Sundays again, too. Library safety personnel have reduced the Police Department costs to the City. She concluded that she would vote for this agreement because they need to have money for the Library, or lose the Library as they know it.

Commissioner Wolff commented that she appreciated the very difficult conversations that were had. As a lifelong learner and educator, the removal of the 7 mills of funding from the management agreement with the Library was and still is an anathema to her for an educated and informed citizenry. The recommendation flew in the face of a well-planned and successful levy election campaign. As someone who has had to make difficult fiscal decisions during her long career, she knew that a compromise was the only way to ensure some level of funding would remain in the management agreement. Her fear was that they would lose all seven mills. The opportunity to continue with the 3.5 mills she felt was the best thing they would have. She also saw the need for updating the management agreement to better reflect a Library of today and tomorrow. With retaining 3.5 mills over the next four years rather than ending in two years as it was originally proposed, she has confidence in the Library Director, the Board and the staff that they will take the necessary time to make best use of those funds in addition to the voted dollars.

As a citizen who works hard for our community as a whole, she knows there are many entities in our city and our county that are facing funding challenges. It is not just the city. Out of these difficult fiscal times, slowing down to seek input is crucial, as is looking ahead to accomplish our desired goals. Retaining this level of funding for the next four years has been what she could see was a best-case scenario.

The Commission has been asked several times how these funds will be used. She will be recommending to the City Manager and fellow Commissioners that this money be used to support our Court and Legal Departments. In the future when they have to go out for another request, it will be for Police and Fire alone.

In response to Mayor Reeves, City Clerk Lisa Kunz restated the motion on the floor, as follows:

Commissioner McKenney moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, to approve the 2024 Management Agreement between the City of Great Falls and the Board of Trustees of the Great Falls Public Library for services and financial support through June 30, 2029.

Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

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Motion carried 4-1 (Commissioner Tryon dissenting).

**ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS**

**CITY COMMISSION**

**13. COMMISSION INITIATIVES.**

None.

**14. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, **Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Mayor Reeves, to adjourn the regular meeting of November 19, 2024, at 9:32 p.m.**

Motion carried 5-0.

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Mayor Reeves

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City Clerk Lisa Kunz

**Minutes Approved: December 3, 2024**