City Commission Special Work Session Civic Center, Gibson Room 212 Mayor Reeves presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 2:00 PM

**CITY COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:** Cory Reeves, Susan Wolff, Joe McKenney, Shannon Wilson and Rick Tryon.

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Greg Doyon and Deputy City Manager Chuck Anderson, City Attorney David Dennis; Human Resources Director Gaye McInerney and Training/Development Coordinator Mark Willmarth; Information Technology Director Todd Feist and GIS Specialist Nathaniel Williams; Public Works Director Chris Gaub; Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Deputy Director Kirsten Wavra, Financial/Tax/Budget Analyst Levi Johnson and Grant Administrator Tom Hazen; Library Director Susie McIntyre; Municipal Court Judge Steve Bolstad and Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec; Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Fire Marshal Mike McIntosh and Deputy Chief EMS Jeremy Virts; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

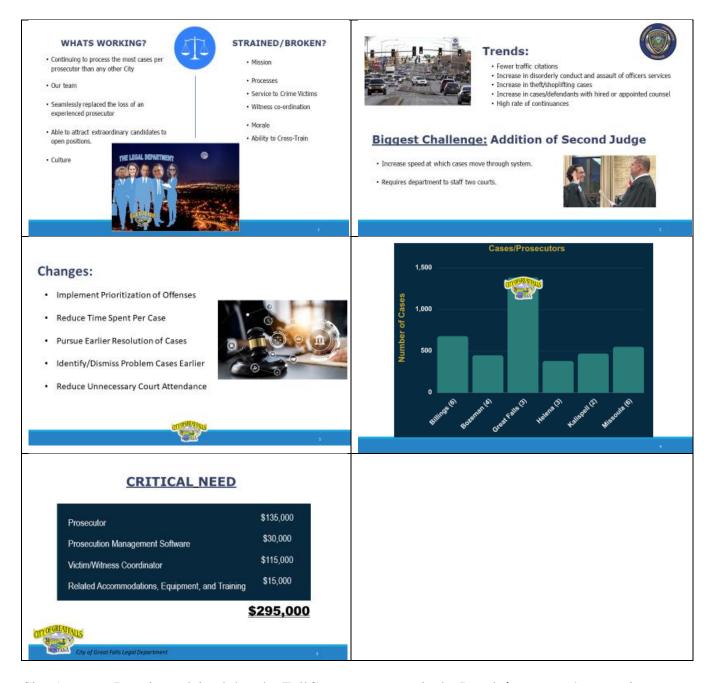
#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

#### 1. PUBLIC SAFETY DISCUSSION

City Manager Greg Doyon explained that public safety was identified as a priority by the Commission at the January 8, 2024 City Commission Retreat. Areas of discussion included having a better understanding of whether the City's goals were in alignment with the community's goals, the impact of tax adjustments that occurred over the last year, a potential levy asks from other taxing entities and why voters did not support the levy. Potential considerations included a public safety advisory panel, survey for community members, Citizen's Academy's education and direct response from the affected public safety departments.

City Attorney David Dennis reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:



City Attorney Dennis explained that the FullCourt system made the Legal department's operations more efficient; however, it no longer has access to the system. He added that losing a prosecutor or support staff would be devastating to the Legal Department.

Mayor Reeves inquired if other Cities in Montana have access to the FullCourt system.

City Attorney Dennis responded that Great Falls was unique with regard to having access to the FullCourt system and other municipalities use other data management software.

With regard to the "Changes and Critical Need" slides, Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the \$295,000 would be the Legal Department's ask in the upcoming budget.

City Attorney Dennis added that City staff considered a grant for a Victim Witness Coordinator position; however, it made more sense to wait for another grant cycle because there would need to be a commitment to continue that position once the grant funds were no longer available. Billings funded at least two positions through that same grant.

City Manager Doyon further explained that he declined the grant in anticipation of this year's budget because he did not want to commit the City to funding a position that could not be supported.

Commissioner Wilson commended that she observed Municipal Court and was impressed with how they were able to move through cases; however, she was concerned about the tag-teaming between the prosecutors and dismissal of most charges.

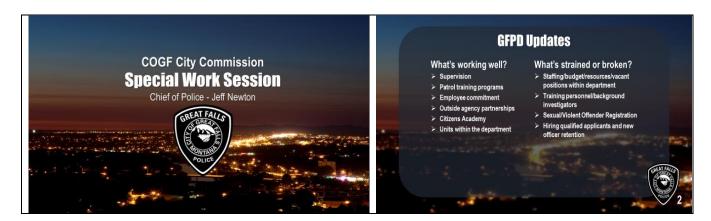
City Attorney Dennis responded that some charges are dismissed because of resource issues and an additional prosecutor would help negate those concerns, as well as the workload.

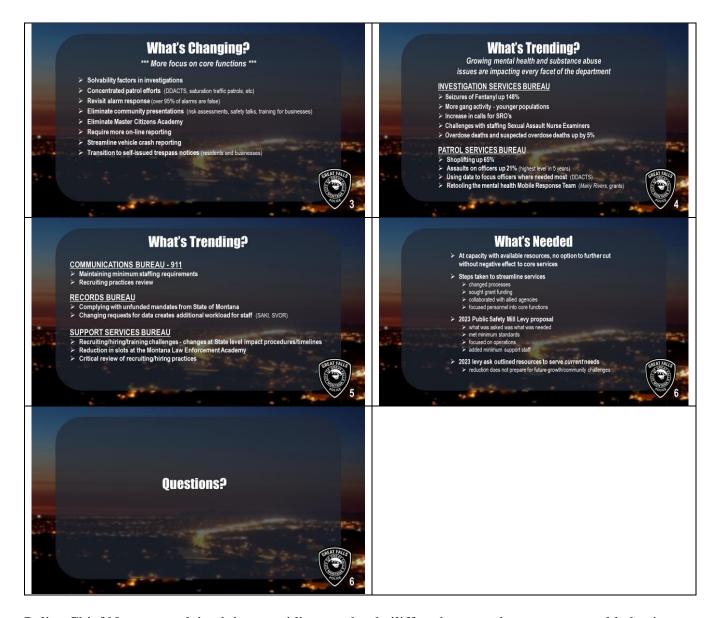
Commissioner Wolff commented that the City is unable to appropriately take care of the crime that is occurring because of a lack of resources.

With regard to the "Changes" slide, Commissioner McKenney inquired about the prioritization of offenses and if the Legal Department would reduce time spent per case or choose which cases to spend time on.

City Attorney Dennis responded that cases that affect the community most would be top priority and the Legal Department would reduce time spent per case, choose which cases to spend time on and develop strategies for eliminating difficult cases without sacrificing a good result.

Police Chief Jeff Newton reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:





Police Chief Newton explained that providing another bailiff to the second courtroom would also impact the Police Department. The busier the Police Department is impacts the Legal Department and Municipal Court. Referring to the downtown infrastructure, Police Chief Newton stated if there is not an effective public safety component, it is difficult to have a healthy business growth model. Having community partnerships is crucial and the Police Department would continue to do the best it can with what it has because it has cut and streamlined as much as it can. There were 109 calls for service per day the past week and the volume of calls continues to increase.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that the same amount, approximately \$4.6 million, requested during the public safety levy process, is what the Police Department would still need. Referring to a signed petition about community livability and public safety responses received by the Commission, Commissioner Wolff commented that the City would be unable to maintain quality of life policing

methods until it can find the resources to enhance public safety. Commissioner Wolff indicated that she saw where a department was producing videos as a part of recruitment processes and would send the information to Police Chief Newton.

Commissioner Wilson commented that she remembered when officers would attend Neighborhood Council (NC) meetings to provide updates and having services continue to decrease even further is difficult.

Police Chief Newton responded that there were not enough officers to attend NC meetings; however, upon request, updates could be provided to a Neighborhood Council liaison.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the Police Department would make an ask in the upcoming budget.

Commissioner McKenney inquired about community outreach programs and core functions that have been eliminated.

Police Chief Newton responded that NC meetings, safety talks, basic crime prevention, traffic control, investigations, citations, effective evidence handling, 911 Center and Records Bureau.

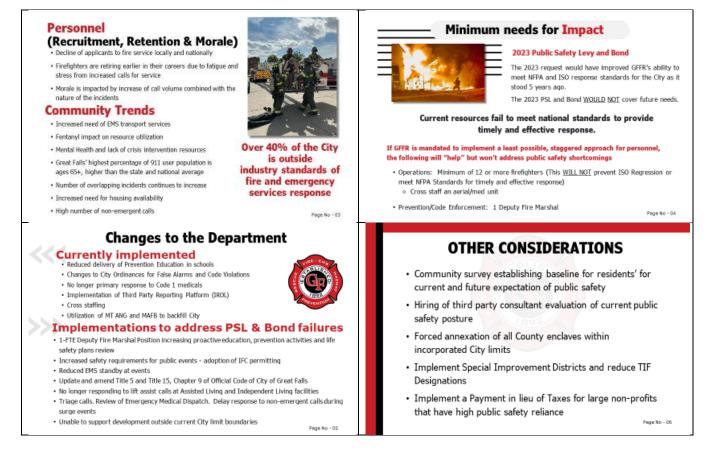
Mayor Reeves added that 86 Neighborhood Watch programs have been eliminated.

Commissioner Tryon stated that he heard one of the reasons why the levy did not pass was because the community does not feel there is a problem.

Police Chief Newton responded that individuals need to be more engaged in the community because they do not believe there is problem until they become a victim or are personally affected by a crime.

Fire Chief Jeremy Jones reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:





Fire Chief Jones explained that it takes every department to be able to provide the most effective and safe response component within the community. The Fire Department needs to get back to being an emergent response department. Fire Chief Jones added that he would be requesting a Deputy Fire Marshal, proximity dispatching software and mental health program in the upcoming budget.

Commissioner Wilson received clarification that approximately 65 percent of calls received are medical and they increases about five percent a year regardless of whether an individual has health care coverage.

Commissioner Tryon commented that the City needs to do a better job communicating to the public all of the other duties, besides responding to fires, that GFFR does in conjunction with the Police Department and community partners. He expressed appreciation to Fire Chief Jones for his blunt and honest assessment about the situation the community would be facing.

Commissioner McKenney explained that in 1970, a bond helped build the four fire stations, which employed 102 GFFR personnel. Currently there are 70 GFFR personnel, which is a skeleton crew. He inquired about the services that have been eliminated since 1970 and decline of GFFR personnel.

Fire Chief Jones responded that in 1972 there were 102 full time GFFR personnel covering approximately 15 square miles and currently there are 71 GFFR personnel covering 27 square miles. The bond included a training center; however, the center is currently condemned. There were more labor intensive fires in

the past; however, there were more units available. The focus going into the upcoming budget is to make a stronger stance on the preventative side enforcing laws and the International Fire Codes for large assembly events in the community. The decline of GFFR personnel is stress and culture related, as well as work load.

Commissioner Wolff stated that the City needs to figure out an effective way to get the message about public safety out to the entire community. She expressed support of implementing a payment in lieu of taxes for large businesses.

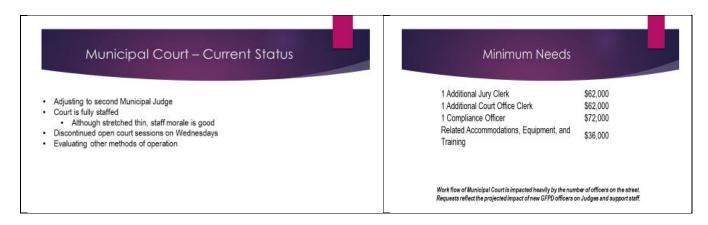
City Manager Doyon clarified that any code changes require City Commission approval and Fire Chief Jones wants to move GFFR into a prevention model instead of a reactive model. The Commission mentioned at the Retreat, that it was interested in economic development, infrastructure and public safety.

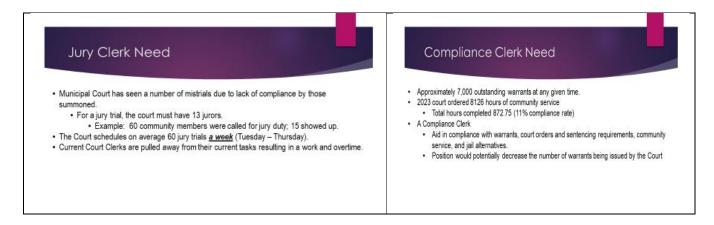
Commissioner Wolff added that the Commission also mentioned at the Retreat that it wanted to explore infill projects as well.

Mayor Reeves called a recess at 3:43 pm and called the meeting back to order at 3:48 pm.

Municipal Court Judge Steve Bolstad encouraged the legislators present at the Special Work Session to take the opportunity to talk to the four public safety department heads. Judge Bolstad explained that the increase in theft and shoplifting cases is more than likely a direct result of HB 133 because it took away the time spent for first time offenses. In May 2023, Municipal Court switched from a program based system to FullCourt Enterprise, a web based system put out by the State of Montana Office of Court Administrator. Most courts, including District Court, utilizes or will be utilizing FullCourt Entersprise. Municipal Court does not make the decision as to whether the prosecutors can utilize FullCourt and is made by a higher level to safe guard the criminal justice system.

Municipal Court Judge Bolstad reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint:





Commissioner Wilson commented that she was impressed by the volume of work Municipal Court does, how well things run and for working with individuals by offering community service or payment arrangements.

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any public comment.

**Jeremy Trebas**, Senate District 13, City resident, commented that he would be available to discuss his opinions and thoughts.

**Fred Anderson**, Montana House of Representatives District 20, expressed appreciation to City staff for the information and the opportunity to attend. Mr. Anderson suggested reaching out to him if there was anything he could do to assist the City.

**Terry Thompson**, 317 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, commented that she belongs to an advocacy committee called the Electric City Citizens for Public Safety. The committee wants to be more actively engaged and invested in assisting the City find a way to provide information to the community with regard to how citizens are going to be impacted. Ms. Thompson suggested that the Commission and City staff contact her for more information.

**Russ Miner**, Montana House of Representatives District 19, expressed appreciation to the Commission and City staff for the educational presentation.

City Manager Doyon summarized that the City made a deliberate effort to build capacity in the general fund; however, it failed because the City was not growing enough. Approximately 80 percent of the general fund already goes to supporting police, fire, and court and legal, which leaves approximately \$8 million to reallocate. Expenses that fall under the general fund include the City Commission, City Manager, Neighborhood Councils, City Clerk, Animal Shelter, a contingency amount, an agreement with the County to fund the City County Health Department and miscellaneous administration. Miscellaneous administration was \$1.1 million last year and almost half of that goes towards public safety related capital purchases and there would not be enough left over unless severe cuts were made.

There are a few challenges as a community dealing with public safety needs, including a statewide

property tax that allows the City to raise revenues to a certain rate of inflation average; however, sometimes that is not sufficient to meet the expenses. The uptick in City growth is in Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts or where new tax revenue stays within to help support additional infrastructure or residential units and does not yield a significant amount to support public safety needs.

Commissioner Wolff suggested surveying a broad spectrum of community members by doing google polls because they are far less expensive than other polls. It needs to be determined what questions should be asked, it should be kept short and simple, but provide enough information about what the community could support.

Commissioner McKenney suggested a public safety advisory panel to help determine funding and/or service reduction recommendations. He provided and discussed a Public Safety Advisory Panel handout.

Commissioner Wilson expressed support of a public safety advisory panel.

Commissioner Tryon expressed support of a public safety advisory panel. He requested that the panel consider the Crime Task Force recommendations and distill them down into actionable items. He inquired if the pannel's recommendations would be centered on another levy ask.

Commissioner McKenney responded that the panel should be allowed the freedom to creative thinking and would need to be educated about the funding needs for public safety.

Commissioner Wolff commented that many citizens did not vote on the Public Safety Levy. She suggested that the panel review the proposed completed survey and police officers and firefighters provide information to the panel.

Commissioner McKenney suggested that Mayor Reeves put together a working group of two City Council Members and other members that he sees appropriate.

Mayor Reeves suggested exploring TIF districts and tax abatements. He commented they are used for economic development and growth; however, the City loses millions of dollars in the general fund.

City Manager Doyon added that there are five total, four have obligations for debt service and one could be retired which would generate money back to the City.

Commissioner McKenney commented that TIF districts and tax abatements need to be used judiciously because they both have penalties that include funging public service.

Commissioner Tryon expressed support of exploring implementing a payment in lieu of taxes for large non-profits that have high public safety reliance, a proposed survey and public safety advisory panel. However, prior to implementing any of those, the City needs to explore finding the resources needed for public safety out of its current budget and resources. Commissioner Tryon added that \$740,000 was the total ask tonight in the upcoming budget from three public safety departments and he would make it a priority to see that they receive that, even if it means hard choices for others. Commissioner Tryon

commented that he would not support another levy until the City demonstrates to the taxpayers that it is willing to explore every available resource in the budget to fund public safety. Public safety departments are top priority and the City cannot ask taxpayers to sacrifice their incomes when it cannot ask its own departments to make sacrifices.

Commissioner Wolff commented that the questions in a proposed survey need to be worded in a way that would help the City get the answers it needs. It would also need to be determined who would receive and analyze the survey.

Mayor Reeves suggested reaching out to other cities in Montana to see if they have ever done a survey after a bond or levy failure.

City Manager Doyon summarized that members for a public safety advisory panel would be determined and the administration and Park and Recreation groups in the general fund would be considered. He added that he would query the Commission individually about those two groups.

Commissioner Tryon commented that there are other funding options available to departments receiving general fund subsidies and fees in their enterprise fund could be increased.

Commissioner Wolff suggested implementing some of the needs that Fire Chief Jones brought up tonight, such as inspection fees.

City Manager Doyon responded that Fire Chief Jones is ready to go on some of this; however, there are details that need to be worked through first.

#### **ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal special work session of February 12, 2024 at 4:50 p.m.