

JOURNAL OF SPECIAL CITY COMMISSION WORK SESSION
Wake Cup Coffee House, 1500 Front Street, Fort Benton, MT
April 1, 2024

City Commission Retreat

City Commission members present: Cory Reeves, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, Shannon Wilson and Susan Wolff.

Staff present: City Manager Greg Doyon and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

Facilitator: Mark Willmarth

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Reeves called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

**1. FACILITATED SESSION WITH MARK WILLMARTH ON
COMMISSION PRIORITIES FOR 2024**

Facilitator Mark Willmarth provided an overview of the retreat proceedings: (1) one person speaks at a time, (2) don't give/take it personal, (3) and focus on problem solving, not finger pointing. For healthy debate when discussing issues, talk about where the Commission is at and where you want it to go. The Commission certainly wants to be a high performing group, but the focus is not about building a team. That is a reality of this environment and structure of local government.

The priorities the Commission came up with at the retreat in January will be reviewed. This Commission has some big decisions in front of them that have to be made. How the Commission goes about doing it makes as much a difference as what the Commission chooses to do.

He began with a roundtable discussion asking the Commission members to describe their first 100 days and what they have learned.

Mayor Reeves responded that he would describe the first 100 days as a whirlwind and not a lot of fun. Government is messy. The Commission needs to work well together, but is not necessarily a team. It has been hard for him not to address the Commission members as a team, because everything he has done throughout his professional career has been a team concept. It has been frustrating learning his role as a new mayor as someone who has never served this type of government, and it has been difficult so far to find his groove.

He has learned that there is a lot of compromise. The biggest frustration to him is not being able to sit down with his fellow Commissioners as a group and have candid conversations because of the open meeting laws. He has learned to do the best he can communicating as the message gets passed along. Not replying all to emails has been very frustrating to him so everyone is on the same page. He always wants to be mindful of his colleagues, but he needs to go back to his roots and being himself. If he disagrees with something he will say something, or if he steps on

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someone's toes or offends someone, he wants them to come to him and say this is how it came across.

Commissioner Wilson responded that she would described her first 100 days as no surprises because she has attended many Commission meetings and been on many City boards and knew how it was going to work. She is frustrated with not being able to reply all to emails because people get left out of the conversation.

Mayor Reeves stepped out of the room at 9:13 a.m. and returned to the meeting at 9:14 a.m.

Commissioner Tryon commented that his last 100 days were the same. There were no major issues that were different than what he has always seen serving on the Commission. There has been concern expressed that this Commission might not be as congenial or tight as the previous Commission. He hasn't seen that. He understands the "team" expression and that they have to work together. But, quite frankly, they are not a team. They all represent a constituency and the larger interest of the whole community. His team is the citizens of Great Falls. He does not take things personal. He has definite opinions and things that he wants to get done for the community. When he pursues those things, there may be disagreement. Great Falls is divided on a lot of issues. He is fine with whatever the consensus outcomes are, because that is their job. This Commission is going to have some challenges ahead and hard decisions to make. He hopes they can make those decisions in a way that, after the decision is made, leave that decision and go on to the next thing.

Commissioner McKenney commented that his first 100 days was like teaching an old dog new tricks. He brought his legislative ways to the table, which is not how a City Commission works. Learning to live with a muzzle has been difficult for him. It is still confusing when he can speak up if it is a broad community issue, or when he can't because it is a zoning change for one specific property. He also wrestled with the lack of ability the City Commission has compared to the Legislature to influence our community. It took him nine months to get comfortable on the City Commission. They are all fallible people. The important thing with Robert's Rules is, even though no one knows all the rules and they may get bent, everyone feels like their voice was heard and the community's voice was heard.

A mental challenge he has is serving with Cory because they both ran for the same office. There were times when Bob Kelly would do things and he would just call him and ask what he was thinking. He has held back calling Cory on things he disagreed with because he didn't want it to appear like sour grapes. He can't imagine being elected mayor and not having served on the Commission first to learn the ropes. What is important to him is that they are an effective working group. He likes the four to one or three to two votes because that reflects the community. He thinks they are all learning their way just fine.

Commissioner Wolff commented that it was very stressful when she chaired her first Commission meeting as Mayor Pro Tem. She knew what Cory would be feeling. She tries to look at the broader picture and understand where people are coming from. She listens to the conversations going on and considers the decisions the Commission makes, and the impacts those decisions will have down the road. She understands where Cory is coming from in that he was used to calling the shots as a

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police officer and SRO. He has a huge learning curve. She hopes he recognizes that the Commissioners and staff are here to help as well. It is okay to make mistakes. We are all here to serve the community as a whole. She looks forward to working with everyone because they bring different experiences to the group.

Facilitator Willmarth pointed out observations from his experience working with Commissions:

- Commissions are not necessarily designed to be a team. Working well together is important.
- It is up to you to exercise your voice. No one has more say unless you allow it. Everyone has an equal voice.
- You represent the entire community, but you also have “your people.”
- This is a complex organization that is hard to understand.
- Most of the issues you address are complex with no easy solutions.
- The community will react, often negatively, to any decision you make. Taking action likely means being wrong to half the community.
- Political versus Professional.
- Consensus can happen but in the end majority rules.
- You won’t always get your way. You have influence, not power.
- Taking action requires courage and risk.
- Functional or dysfunctional is a choice. What we are here to do versus how we do it.

Discussion continued on the leadership role of mayor running the Commission meetings and ceremonial duties outside of Commission meetings. The mayor is the voice and face of Great Falls. If on the failing side of a vote, it is still important for the mayor to represent the voices of the other Commission members.

Mayor Reeves noted that people like to see a variety of their representation. When contacted by the media, he will reach out in certain instances to the other Commission members to participate.

The mayor’s role is not to tell the other Commission members what to do. They discussed an instance that occurred, and how to move past it.

They also discussed the process of nominations, and preferred opening discussion first before making a motion.

Manager Doyon commented that it is important for the Commission to establish a rapport with the department heads. As far as contacting staff directly, the first three months is a process of learning. The Commission as a whole has been penetrating into the organization a little bit more than normal. When it crosses the line the Commission members will get pushback from the department heads, and if it persists he would say something.

The Commission discussed Robert’s Rules of Order and an awkward situation amending a motion to make appointments to a board. Commissioner McKenney suggested that the motion on the floor

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could have been called for a vote and failed. Then a Commissioner could have made another motion with different names.

To get the Commission's work done effectively, they have to figure out how they are going to do that together. Facilitator Willmarth commented that when he has worked with dysfunctional teams or groups, they were more focused on how they did things, not necessarily what they were there to do.

He asked the Commission to review their mutual expectations for communication and engagement that they came up with at the Commission retreat in January, how they think they are doing and are those mutual expectations still valid and valuable moving forward.

Break 10:20-10:37 a.m.

Discussion commenced on the mutual expectations for communication and engagement agreed upon at the January 2024 retreat:

“How we choose to do our work (action)”

1. Calling each other to stay in touch about what the others are hearing
2. Be mindful about open meeting rules and not “replying all” via email
3. Be 100% transparent and aware that written communication could be subject to a right to know request or litigation
4. Announce decorum rules at the start of the meeting
5. A pregnant pause before a motion is made
6. Don't call on Commission members unless a hand is raised; ask if there are any comments rather than calling on each member or invite input before moving to the next item of business
7. Keep all discussion and comments relevant to the agenda item, and within the purview of what the City Commission can do; Commission initiatives is the time to bring up items not on the agenda, but still within the purview of what the City can do
8. Providing the City Manager a heads up on issues or requests for additional information prior to the Commission meeting is helpful

Item 8 - In response to Commissioner Tryon, Manager Doyon commented that the Commission members can call Department Heads for basic information. He does ask that the Department Heads let him know when they have had Commission contact so that he can anticipate a potential problem that may surface.

Item 1 - Commissioner Wilson clarified that she prefers to communicate City business on her City phone - 8190, not her personal phone.

All agreed it is helpful to know when Commission members will not be available for calls or to check emails so they don't think they are being ignored.

Mayor Reeves feels that calling each other to stay in touch is pretty effective. It is frustrating they can't reply all. He tries to be mindful whether it is administrative or not and where that line is.

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Commissioner Wilson feels she gets left out of the conversation a lot because of the way things have to operate. One on one calls take time and are not very efficient, but is the nature of local government.

Item 6 – All liked the process.

Item 4 – Decorum rules are now added to the agenda. Mayor Reeves will highlight rules when there are a lot of new members attending the meeting or when necessary.

Item 5 – Commissioner McKenney clarified it was his request to slow things down a bit. After discussion, Commissioner McKenney said Item 5 could be removed from the list. No one objected.

Facilitator Willmarth directed the Commission to commence discussion on the mutual expectations agreed upon at the January 2024 retreat:

“How we choose to be with each other (behavior)”

1. Civil discourse, being respectful of one another, and providing respectful feedback
2. Be okay with agreeing differently
3. Beware of attempts from outside forces for their own reasons to divide the Commission members, making it an ineffective body
4. Demonstrate that the Commission is not divided, and will lead by example
5. Be mindful of the impact of tone and delivery of comments to staff

Item 3 – Commission members may not agree, but they all know the importance of the job that they are doing and are deliberative and thoughtful. If the members don't all vote the same, it doesn't mean they are divided.

Commissioner Wilson provided an example of a member of the community that sent an extensive email to all the members of the Commission except her in an attempt to create animosity.

After further discussion, Item 3 can be removed from the list. It goes back to Item 1 under “How we choose to do our work (action),” and staying in touch about what the others are hearing.

Item 4 is a Commission that works well together and is comfortable in disagreement. The Commission members can be divided in their votes, but once a vote is made they support that vote moving forward. They may disagree, but will not be disagreeable with one another.

Facilitator Willmarth concluded that, the bigger the issue the harder it will be for the Commission to do that. Holding each other accountable to that behavior is important.

Items 1 & 2 – all agreed the Commission was doing well. Intentions versus impact. Be mindful of what you are saying and how it is may be interpreted.

Facilitator Willmarth asked if the Commission had any other items that need to be part of their expectations. No one responded.

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Item 5 – Commissioner Wolff discussed Gracious Space training and provided examples of asking questions to help understand if you don't agree with somebody. She is mindful of the words she is choosing to use and her tone of voice. An intuitive tone is better than an accusatory tone.

Facilitator Willmarth reviewed and discussed the “Stages of Group Development” – forming, storming, norming and performing. It is not unusual for any group to have tension. Find ways to have healthy debate and put things out on the table that need to be addressed.

Facilitator Willmarth asked how the Commission wanted the community to describe the Commission, and what it wanted the culture internally to be?

Commissioner Tryon would like the community to view the Commission as a deliberative body that is open, honest and transparent, and not be perceived as a “good old boys club” that rubber stamps anything that staff puts before them.

Commissioner Wilson takes exception to the term “good old boys club” running things, when there is a conglomeration of different groups around town. It is inflammatory to use the words “good old boys club” when it has only been 100 days.

Facilitator Willmarth directed the conversation from looking back to looking forward. He asked what this Commission is doing that moves the City away from that concept.

Commissioner Wolff commented that the five Commission members represent a different viewpoint. The difference people see is this Commission is in agreement about being more proactive about economic growth, workforce development, and community growth.

Mayor Reeves commented that the majority of people he surrounds himself with respect and support the work of the Commission.

Commissioner Tryon commented that there is a general mistrust of government. He thinks the Commission is perceived that way by a substantial number of the community.

Facilitator Willmarth again directed the Commission to look forward. He asked if the Commission members agreed with Commissioner Tryon’s comments of wanting the community to describe the Commission as honest, transparent, and not a rubber stamp Commission.

Commissioner McKenney commented that a lot of things that come before the Commission are mundane, don’t require a lot of conversation, and gives the impression of a rubber stamp. Perception is reality.

Facilitator Willmarth summarized that the Commission is asking questions and looking at things from every angle and not just rubber stamping. Intentions versus impact. The Commission needs to be mindful of what their true intentions are for what they are doing. If their intentions are positive, then they have a positive impact. They also do things for effect, such as asking questions so the public hears the answers so they understand it like the Commission. They are doing things

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for the right effect. That can be a valuable way to show the community the Commission is transparent.

Manager Doyon commented that staff tries to prepare the Commission to make the best decisions that they can. There is a lot of pre-work that gets done individually, at work sessions, and at the Commission meeting. Staff doesn't know what the outcome is going to be from the Commission. So, he never really understood the "rubber stamp" comment. Regardless of what the Commission does, they are never going to make all people happy. The public doesn't understand everything the Commission goes through, the time and energy it takes, and don't follow the work sessions. One of the things staff adds in the background of the agenda reports is when an item has been talked about before. It is good reference for the Commission, and it is good for the Commission to mention it in their decision making process.

Lunch 12:00-12:45 p.m.

Manager Doyon summarized that the Commission's top priorities from the January retreat were public safety, economic development, housing, growth management plan, 2025 legislative session preparation, communication and education, and an initiative to research the medical overlay zone.

With regard to economic development, he reported that Director Cherry is in the middle of performing an audit and will be providing a report and making a recommendation to the Commission. He is always monitoring what it takes to support economic development, and what the City is investing in infrastructure to make sure it can support growth and development in the right way in the community.

With regard to housing, the Commission had focused in on facilitating infill, and exploring affordable housing options. There was also discussion about a camping ordinance, which was impeded by a recent US Supreme Court decision. GFDA will be issuing a follow-up housing study which will be further revealing. They will use the study and the current amount of multi-family housing development that is underway as a proof positive that there is a demand.

The City will be in the midst of the growth management study, plan and update for the next year and a half. He thinks there will be a shift from multi-family to subdivisions. Another big impact is updating soil requirements for building. It has become an obstruction when someone can't build a home because they can't get an engineer to perform a geo-technical report. Once the soil issue gets addressed he thinks it will be "game on" because of the growth Great Falls is seeing.

Commissioner McKenney added that there are people his age that want to move out of their house into an apartment. The apartment complexes that are being built will help open up housing.

Manager Doyon reported that seven proposals were received in response to the Growth Management Plan. Director Cherry is getting a steering committee. He encouraged the Commission to monitor that steering committee for its functionality and usefulness in the whole process.

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The other priority was preparing for the 2025 legislative session. Some of the reports and bulletins from the Montana League of Cities and Towns shows the direction that the interim committees are moving with local government type legislation. He suggested not waiting until November to get engaged with local legislators.

Mayor Reeves inquired if Manager Doyon reached out to others to see if they would want to partner with the City to retain a lobbyist.

Manager Doyon responded he reached out to the School District and the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is up in the air and is focused on an executive director. He and Tom Moore touched base. He thinks there is interest there. They would just need a lobbyist that is okay with multi-representation and understanding what would happen if there would be a conflict between the entities.

If the City is not able to partner with another entity, Mayor Reeves asked if it is still the desire of the City to retain its own lobbyist.

Manager Doyon responded it always comes down to the budget. As he goes through budget development he will see if there potentially is some money to help with lobbying. Towards the end of the session and committee meetings it is nice to have someone in Helena working on the City's behalf.

Commissioner Tryon inquired who at the City tracks legislation that affects Great Falls.

Manager Doyon responded when he gets word about certain legislation he sends it to the department heads to monitor, and they also have their own affiliations.

Commissioner Wolff reported that MLCT will have a meeting in June. As the district representative, she will keep the Commission and City Manager informed.

Commissioner Tryon suggested Commissioner Wolff keep on her radar legislation that may affect Great Falls specifically that MLCT is not addressing. It is important to coordinate and to make the legislators aware of what the City faces that they are not aware of.

Commissioner McKenney suggested again starting out with an informal meeting with the legislators after the primary election. During the last session, they had a weekly noon Zoom call with legislators and community leaders that he thought was effective. Two or three legislators would become advocates and work with the City very diligently.

Commissioner Tryon suggested it would be helpful if the City pre-defined what it wanted local legislators to be aware of and address.

Manager Doyon commented he would continue to work on seeing if the City could partner with another entity to get a lobbyist at an affordable price, watch the MLCT resolutions, and figure out what the City's priorities are going to be. The weekly Zoom meetings are important.

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Mayor Reeves inquired if the City's ideas, visions and missions would align better with another county government.

Manager Doyon responded that he doesn't think a county would want to do that because their form of government laws are very different from local government.

Commissioner Wolff reminded everyone of the upcoming Local Government Review and Department of Revenue reassessment.

Mayor Reeves suggested going out for another levy in March before the Department of Revenue assessments come out.

Commissioner McKenney noted the challenge is that the legislators are still in session. The Commission should wait until the Legislature adjourns in April and have the public safety levy in June of next year.

Manager Doyon commented it would be a good question for MLCT if the levy request was before the voters in March and it passes, if it would not be subject to any kind of cap that the Legislature may adopt thereafter.

With regard to communication and education, Manager Doyon noted that he would get something scheduled in the near future.

With regard to the overlay zone initiative, Commissioner Wolff reported that she reached out to Benefis, Clinic, Touro, Great Falls Central, Great Falls College, McLaughlin, University of Providence, and MSU-College of Nursing. John Goodnow said Benefis would host the meeting on April 11th at 3:00 p.m.

Commissioner McKenney stepped out of the room at 1:12 pm and returned to the meeting at 1:14 pm.

Continuing with updates, Manager Doyon commented that the Commission has worked towards appointing a public safety advisory group. What is it the Commission needs from them in order to decide what their next steps are? A concern he has is how far the Commission wants the advisory group to delve into the budget and operations. The most important thing out of all of it, in his opinion, is that they are prepared to give the Commission a recommendation based on their areas of influence, expertise and experience, on how the Commission should proceed.

Manager Doyon reported that he sits on the MMIA and other related boards. MMIA is not the only entity to offer workers compensation. The State Fund is trying to bring public entities into State Fund for workers compensation coverage. Bozeman was the first community to move to State Fund and realized substantial savings.

Coming out of the last Commission retreat, Manager Doyon understood that the Commission sought budget savings to address public safety needs, potentially cutting funds from other areas.

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He informed Alan Hulse and the MMIA Board this past week that the Commission charged him with finding savings in the budget, that he had conversations with Bozeman, and requested a quote from State Fund. He wants the Commission to know that, if the City leaves MMIA there is a very good chance that it will change MMIA's financial structure and will change MMIA irreversibly long-term. They may no longer be able to offer workers compensation coverage to their members.

Manager Doyon commented that getting the rates and understanding where the City could have some cost savings is the right thing to do, but he wanted to make the Commission aware that if the City goes down that road, there is going to be a deeper impact than just Great Falls.

The City has its property and liability coverage with MMIA and that legal protection will not change.

With regard to the public safety poll, Manager Doyon reported that the first company he contacted for a statistically valid survey was approximately \$35,000. The question for the Commission will be timing. Does the Commission want to conduct the poll and tell the committee what the poll said, or hear from the committee first and then do a poll. Another component is the upcoming legislative session. If the Commission wants to go out for another public safety levy in March or June, the City should be doing education now.

Mayor Reeves commented that he knows there is a need and a necessity of a public safety levy, but does not think people will support it if they had to vote on it again this year. He thinks the education needs to come from the bottom up, and that the City could learn from Kalispell, Missoula, Billings and Helena.

Commissioner Wolff noted that in Kalispell, the firefighters union, firemen and their families went door to door.

Commissioner Tryon agreed that this year is not the time to go back out for another public safety levy. He believes the Commission's mistake was asking for too much all at once. He will not support any public safety levy unless and until the City has used all of its resources. Part of those resources that the City has available is the 7 mills in the yearly agreement with the Library. That agreement was yearly and never intended to be in perpetuity.

Mayor Reeves commented that taking back the 7 mills could upset a huge group of people that would then not support a public safety levy.

Commissioner Tryon responded that the money doesn't belong to the Library. It is general fund money that belongs to the taxpayers of the City.

Commissioner McKenney commented that people voted for a vibrant, successful library. He is confident that there is a successful, vibrant library with the 2 mills the Library has and the 15 mills the Library is going to get. He doesn't think putting the 7 mill Library Agreement on the table to negotiate is taking away from a successful vibrant Library.

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Commissioner Wolff commented that the Commission made a point of saying it would no longer provide the \$350,000, but did not make a point of saying that the 7 mills in the agreement could possibly be taken away. The Library is fortunate to have a Foundation and has a master plan. They worked hard on their levy and it was successful.

Commissioner Wilson noted that she attended the Library's first master planning session. The Library was very clear about how their funding was going to work with the addition of the mill levy (17 mills total), the Library giving back the \$350,000, and keeping the 7 mills from the Library Agreement. To take away the 7 mills destroys the plan that the Library had and what the public voted for.

Commissioner McKenney commented that he met with the Library Director and Board Chair and all agreed it was a good idea to renegotiate the agreement and that the 7 mills was on the table.

Commissioner Wolff commented that the Library has a committee ready to negotiate the agreement with the City.

Mayor Reeves asked if it would be better for the public safety levy to be put on the November ballot or at a special election.

Manager Doyon suggested a special election, not combined with the November election.

Commissioner McKenney comment that, no matter if it is a special or general election, he thinks 100% of the people participate in one way or another because ballots are delivered to their mailboxes.

Discussion commenced about choosing the City's negotiating team.

Mayor Reeves noted that, regardless of who is on the City's negotiating team, whatever is negotiated by the two teams has to come before the City Commission to be voted upon.

After discussion, it was suggested that Joe McKenney, Susan Wolff, Greg Doyon and David Dennis serve as the City's negotiating team with the Library Board negotiating team.

Commissioner Wilson handed out the bylaws of the City County Board of Health. She noted that County Commissioner Briggs suggested that if the bylaws were re-written maybe it would take care of the problem rather than waiting for a court decision.

Manager Doyon responded that he would touch base with City Attorney Dennis.

Commissioner McKenney provided background information that a new state law set forth that there would be a governing body on Health Boards and the governing body had to be elected officials. He talked with the County Commissioners individually and was told to put in writing the agreement that the governing body would consist of two County Commissioners and one City

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Commissioner. The County Commission voted against it. The City didn't renew the temporary agreement and now it is at the Supreme Court.

Manager Doyon commented that, after the Commission discusses its negotiating team under Commission Initiatives, he will set up a time with the Library Board to negotiate the agreement.

Facilitator Willmarth asked everyone to quickly discuss one take away from today's session.

Mayor Reeves commented getting to know his colleagues a little better, being open and candid, and being able to agree to disagree.

Commissioner Wilson appreciates this time to discuss complex issues without having to make awkward motions, or have one on one conversations.

Commissioner McKenney's takeaway was the importance of communication and how to agree differently.

Commissioner Wolff appreciates the strengths, knowledge and experience each member brings to the City. It is hard work.

Facilitator Willmarth wrapped up that there was a lot of emotion during conversations about the Library and public safety. He encouraged them to think about what was discussed when they are not worked up, because that is going to play out when things get challenging. He also noted that Commissioner Tryon dominates the conversation a lot. When he looks at the dynamics of how the Commission functions, it becomes obvious very quickly when the conversation gets hard what those dynamics really are. He encouraged them to be mindful of that and that they operate the way they do, in part, because of the structure of government they are in. How they manage to agree differently and do the right thing for the community is leading by example.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the informal special Commission Work Session of April 1, 2024, adjourned at 2:42 p.m.