

Regular Public Safety Advisory Committee Meeting Civic Center, 2 Park Drive South,
Gibson Room 212, Great Falls, MT 59401

CALL TO ORDER: PSAC Chair Sandra Guynn called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL: Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) Members present: Sandra Guynn, Joe McKenney, Mike Parcel, George Nikolakakos, Shannon Wilson and Aaron Weissman. Tony Rosales and Jeni Dodd participated via Zoom (Dodd appearing at 6:08 p.m.). Wendy McKamey arrived at 7:55 p.m.

PSAC Chair Guynn reported that PSAC Member Thad Reiste resigned.

PSAC Member Weissman inquired if Mr. Reiste resigning would affect a quorum.

City Attorney David Dennis responded that he would have to review the resolution that formed the committee to be sure, because unlike most committees that have a fixed number of positions and members, are replaced if they resign.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

1. SCRIVENER'S ERROR CORRECTION TO THE JUNE 19, 2024 MEETING MINUTES

PSAC Chair Guynn moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, that the PSAC approve the Minutes of the June 19, 2024, PSAC Meeting as corrected.

PSAC Chair Guynn asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Committee. Hearing none, PSAC Chair Guynn called for the vote.

Motion carried – 7-0.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM JULY 3, 2024

PSAC Member Weissman moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, that the PSAC accept the Minutes of the July 3, 2024, PSAC Meeting as presented.

PSAC Chair Guynn asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Committee. Hearing none, PSAC Chair Guynn called for the vote.

Motion carried – 7-0.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

3. EMPLOYEE TESTIMONIES – STAFF FROM FIRE DEPARTMENT

Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) Deputy Fire Marshal Tom Zaremski reported that the fire suppression side is reactive and fire prevention is proactive. The Fire Prevention Bureau (Bureau) attempts to prevent fires by public education, code enforcement (International Fire Code), fire investigations to determine origin and cause, and project/ plan reviews for occupancies. The Bureau performs inspections of businesses, large assembly events and life safety systems. It takes several personnel to do code enforcement, project/plan reviews, fire investigations and public education. With the amount of call volume, the Bureau does not have time to do public education and relies on the suppression side to help with some of these things. Fire crews have to stay on scene until the fire investigation is complete and the Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) has to investigate if there is any criminal intent to the fire.

GFFR has not increased its staffing for at least 26 years and without the additional personnel, there will be a breaking point. GFFR personnel are getting the job done to the best of their ability; however, with additional personnel, GFFR could be doing better to streamline some of these processes. There has to be investment into public safety to receive positive outcomes.

Fire Chief Jeremy Jones reiterated that GFFR has three major divisions: Fire Prevention; Operations and Suppression; and Emergency Management and Preparedness.

PSAC Chair Guynn inquired what GFFR requested in the levy for the Bureau, if public education includes adults and what GFFR would do if it had the money.

Deputy Fire Marshal Zaremski responded that the Bureau requested \$141,950 for one additional Deputy Chief of Fire Prevention. The Bureau does transitional meetings in retirement communities about safety and fire prevention because what those individuals do could affect others. He added that with not being able to get back into the elementary schools since Covid, there would be that generation of kids not receiving fire prevention messages. If GFFR had the money, it would be more proactive by bringing public education programs into the community and two major colleges, Public Service Announcement (PSA's) and media for special events. He commented that sometimes the results from public education might not be immediate; however, it can spark community pride in kids and adults.

PSAC Member Weissman inquired if code enforcement technology makes construction safer and about the impact fireworks over the fourth of July has on GFFR.

Deputy Fire Marshal Zaremski responded that the codes are minimums to safety. Currently, most buildings are built with lightweight materials, which can cause quicker fires and more catastrophic damage to the buildings. However, Life Safety Systems and following the code helps keeps things safer. During the Fourth of July, GFFR hires extra crews and there is a significant rise in call volume and incidences.

Commissioner Wilson inquired if the GFFR still participates in Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) drills.

Fire Chief Jones responded that GFFR has had to cut back services in fire prevention and operations response in order to continue to meet GFFR's core services, such as code 3 emergent response in the community.

Commissioner McKenney inquired if GFFR is falling behind with doing inspections and about project/plan reviews for occupancies being overlooked.

Deputy Fire Marshal Zaremski responded that GFFR makes sure to inspect high-risk occupancies, large assembly events. The goal is to do annual inspections for every business and apartment complex; however, GFFR would have to cut back from public education and other areas. As the City grows and if GFFR stays with its current work force, GFFR would struggle to keep up with annual inspections. Architects, designers and engineers are not necessarily missing anything with regard to project/plan reviews and GFFR confirms that nothing is missed and everything is code compliant.

PSAC Member Rosales inquired who authorizes inspections and who would be liable for an accident if a business were not up to code.

Deputy Fire Marshal Zaremski responded that GFFR follows the International Fire Code adopted by the State of Montana and City. Most businesses will become compliant through education and extended timelines; however, if a violation was not corrected, it would be turned over to the City Legal Department.

Fire Captain Brandon Jarackeski reported that the lack of resources and personnel has affected GFFR, as well as the community. GFFR used to be a presence to kids and the public with its fire prevention education. Those kids could be the next generation of fire fighters for the City. Before the Bureau was created, Engine crews did inspections; however, due to an increase in calls and not responding to calls within a four-minute timeframe, Engine crews had to stop doing those. The benefit of having Engine crews do inspections was they became familiar with buildings in the community and could educate business owners. Currently, the Bureau only has three personnel to do every inspection in the community.

GFFR is unable to respond to incidences in the amount of time for 41% of the surrounding area due to the City expanding from 15 square miles to 26 square miles. The four fire stations were designed to cover 1.5 miles in a circular area around the City, which is why two additional fire stations were requested in the levy. Thirteen firefighters respond to fire calls and the national standard is 17 firefighters. When GFFR arrives on scene, if there is not a life safety issue, it has to wait for a second engine before going into a burning building, which could result in the fire doubling in size and the whole building being lost.

Fire Captain Jarackeski concluded that GFFR has to prioritize Code 1 non-emergent calls and is concerned about the response times. The only thing GFFR can do now is stay resilient and make do with what is offered to them, which is the bare minimum. GFFR is on the razor's edge all of the time and the community is unaware of how under protected it really is. GFFR's minimum ask was what was in the levy, which would have possibly caught GFFR up to today; however, with the City

continuing to expand and the current number of fire stations, longer response times will affect GFFR's Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating, as well as business and property owners taxes.

Commissioner Wilson expressed concerned for GFFR personnel's well-being.

Fire Captain Jarackeski responded that retention and burnout is a nationwide problem and a departmental challenge GFFR faces. He added that additional personnel would help remedy burnout.

PSAC Chair Guynn commented that a citizen had asked her why GFFR responds to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls when an ambulance also responds and if GFFR is interfering with private business.

Fire Captain Jarackeski responded that has to do with educating the public about what their tax dollars pay for. GFFR has a paramedic on every fire engine to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) services to start lifesaving measures quicker. GFFR and the private ambulance service work well together to provide the proper service to an incident.

Fire Chief Jones added that fire trucks are sent to EMS calls because GFFR is strategically located to respond in a timely manner to make a difference with a life safety event. In addition, the next call it responds to might be a house fire and GFFR already has all the tools it needs. Fire Chief Jones explained that EMS is a core service provided to the community and the private ambulance service is a contractor for the City. GFFR and the private ambulance service work and train together and are integrated to create the best pre-hospital system in the State.

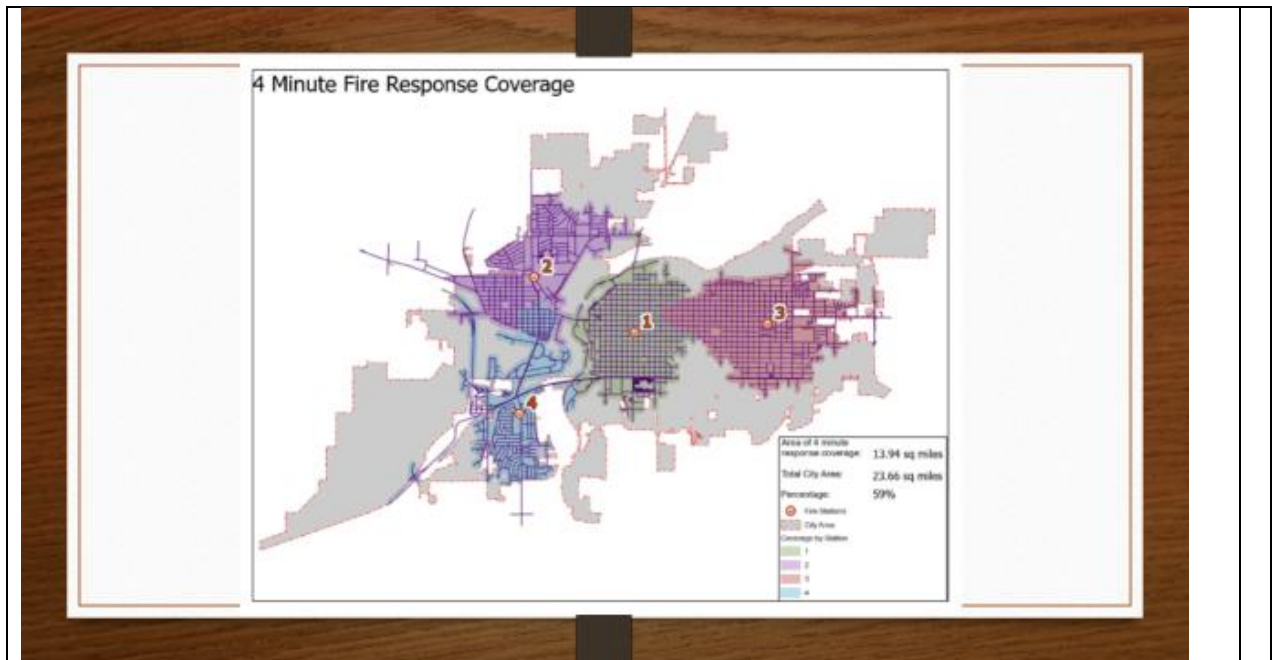
PSAC Chair Guynn commented that she does not believe that message is out there.

Fire Chief Jones responded that the community does not understand the message about a four-minute response time and will not understand until they are personally affected or a catastrophic event happens.

PSAC Member Weissman inquired about the City running its own ambulances when there is a private contractor doing that already.

Fire Chief Jones responded that GFFR sends 13 firefighters to calls when it should be sending 17 firefighters. With a surge event, there are more calls than transport units and per the performance contract, the private contractor has to meet the minimum staffing, which includes two ALS ambulances and one Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance. GFFR does not have a dedicated ambulance company and it cross-staffs. If a disaster was declared, the Benefis ambulance, helicopter and fixed-wing would be a part of the EMS system. Fire Chief Jones noted that GFFR oversees 911 EMS services.

Fire Chief Jeremy Jones reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint slide:



Fire Chief Jones explained that GFFR is trying to provide the best service that it can to the community. His major concerns that are factors facing the community include the following:

- GFFR does not have the personnel to cover the City.
- GFFR does not have fire station coverage to cover the City.
- GFFR does not have a training center to train the current personnel at the level they need to be trained.

Fire Chief Jones concluded that the City is very frugal and stretches a dollar as much as it can; however, it is stretched too thin and there will be a catastrophic failure soon.

PSAC Chair Guynn inquired what Fire Chief Jones absolutely needed if he had to decide tonight.

Fire Chief Jones responded additional personnel, fire station coverage to cover the City and a training center.

PSAC Member Wilson received clarification that GFFR will respond to isolated areas of county within the City, if dispatch send them.

PSAC Member McKenney inquired how many personnel it would take to properly staff the four fire stations.

Fire Chief Jones responded one additional person per station per four platoons and two additional resources to cohabitate out of the two current stations, a total of 28 for now. GFFR could make that work; however, GFFR was asked what it needed to be caught up from 10 years ago and that ask was provided in the levy.

PSAC Member Weismann inquired if a more vigorous code enforcement would allay some of the need by making fires less likely. He further inquired if GFFR has ever considered installing free smoke detectors in homes as a preventative measure.

Fire Chief Jones responded that a more vigorous code enforcement would help; however, it would not limit the City's responsibility to adequately cover the geographical area of the City. The International Fire Codes are for high safety assembly occupancies and GFFR does not have any code enforcement or jurisdiction in private residences. GFFR has considered implementing a program to install free smoke detectors; however, GFFR does not have the personnel, budget or overtime to do proactive efforts and has to prioritize its efforts, which is life safety for the community.

PSAC Member Mike Parcel reported that the Little Shell Tribe is going to have a 13-acre housing development soon. He inquired how GFFR would cover that area.

Fire Chief Jones responded that he does not know yet how that will play out and will have to wait to see if annexation happens.

PSAC Chair Guynn announced that Fire Marshal Mike McIntosh is in the process of doing a capstone research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program and she would provide the draft report to the Committee for review.

4. DISCUSSION ON EMAILS RECEIVED FOR THE COMMITTEE:

- a. From Tim Hodges**
- b. From Terry Bjork with responses from Melissa, Finance Director**
- c. From Mitch Tropila**

PSAC Chair Guynn discussed emails attached to the agenda packet from Tim Hodges, Terry Bjork and Mitch Tropila.

PSAC Member Weissman opined that City finance, tax policy and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) are topics outside the purview of what the PSAC was asked to discuss.

5 ALTERNATIVES TO TIF DISTRICTS PROPOSED BY COMMITTEE MEMBER DODD

PSAC Member Dodd reported that the loss of revenue to the city budget through use of TIF districts for FY 2024 was \$1.2 million. PSAC Member Dodd expressed concern about whether TIF districts work because they should be used for blighted areas; however, the City continues to renew them. She proposed that some of the TIF districts be retired as part of solution.

PSAC Member McKenney commented that retiring TIF districts is something to consider; however, by the time TIF districts are retired, it is the younger generation who will see the benefits. The benefits of restoring blighted areas also needs to be taken into consideration.

PSAC Member Dodd responded that a purpose of a TIF district is to rehabilitate property so it goes back into the taxable base to have revenue coming into the City. There is a problem if the City continues to renew TIF districts instead of putting that money back into the City.

PSAC Member McKenney commented that TIF districts should not go on forever and there needs to be a timeframe when a TIF district is successful and those tax dollars go into the community. The City needs to find that fine line where it is appropriate to make that change.

PSAC Member Rosales concurred with PSAC Member Dodd's comments about TIF districts and added that he does not see the value in them. A part of a TIF district's role is to contribute to the City and it does not seem like TIF districts provide additional value from growth or revenue. It is not for the younger generation to see that benefit, especially with considering having to increase taxes every year and asking for levies.

PSAC Member Weissman commented that Central Avenue was a blighted area and not a place for young children in the 1970's and 1980's, until that TIF district did a massive revitalization. The West Bank area has grown and eventually will be a part of the tax base. PSAC Member Weissman added that he is reluctant to suggest that the City Commission get rid of TIF districts.

Referring to PSAC Member Weissman's comments, PSAC Member Dodd responded that Brownfield funds were used for West Bank and she does not see the need of that TIF district. PSAC Member Dodd added that she heard that downtown was not a blighted area and was a hopping place in the 1970's and 1980's.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that it is great when TIF districts are developed nicely and provide an aesthetic change; however, the underlying lack of growth means that just because one area becomes more vibrant or growth, likely means it is at the cost of another. It is a balancing act about what is considered blight versus what is growing, but at the end of the day, the net effect on the City is there is zero growth and little contribution.

6. CONTINUE WITH THE QUESTIONS INTRODUCED AT THE JUNE 19, 2024 MEETING

PSAC Chair Guynn reported that the following question was introduced at the June 19, 2024 PSAC meeting:

1. Do you feel that police, fire, legal and court provide adequate service levels to the community?

PSAC Member George Nikolakakos responded that there has been more straight talk and passion from City staff at the last two PSAC meetings. PSAC Member Nikolakakos commented that frontline staff are at a breaking point. He encouraged City staff to continue talking more freely and about consequences because citizens are living in a time of inflation and unless they hear that message in a forceful way, it is not going to get through. PSAC Member Nikolakakos suggested that frontline staff provide a component of an ask and a direct recommendation to their needs at the next two PSAC meetings. PSAC Member Nikolakakos concluded that he would provide legislative updates at the August 7, 2024 PSAC meeting.

PSAC Member Dodd mentioned that tax abatements were \$2.7 million for FY 2024 and \$3.4 million for FY 2025. Considering alternatives to tax abatements is important because of the loss of revenue to the city budget.

PSAC Chair Guynn responded that considering alternatives to tax abatements could be one of PSAC Member Dodd's recommendations.

It was the consensus of the Committee to have the next two meetings and provide its draft recommendations at the August 7, 2024 PSAC Meeting.

MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM COMMITTEE

PSAC Member McKenney reiterated that the draft recommendations from Committee members should include at least one of the following broad priorities:

- Public safety
- Police, fire, court and legal
- Funding priorities
- How to engage the community and businesses.

PSAC Member McKenney concluded that a majority rule is important; however, dissenting opinions are also vital.

PUBLIC COMMENT

John Beckman, 301 Skyline Drive NE., provided and read from a prepared statement about what he feels were issues that caused the public safety levy to fail.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Public Safety Advisory Committee, PSAC Member Weissman moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, to adjourn the regular meeting of July 17, 2024, at 8:08 p.m.

Motion carried 9-0.

Chairperson Sandra Guynn

Acting Secretary – Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea

Minutes Approved: August 7, 2024