

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, Aaron Weissman, Jeni Dodd, George Nikolakakos and Mike Parcel. Member Wendy McKamey arrived at 6:02 p.m.

Absent: PSAC Members Tony Rosales.

\*Action Minutes of the last meeting of the Public Safety Advisory Committee\*

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM AUGUST 7, 2024**

1. PSAC Member Weissman moved, seconded by PSAC Member Parcel, that the PSAC accept the Minutes of the August 7, 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.

2. **CONTINUATION OF PSAC MEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION.**

PSAC Member McKenney expressed appreciation to the PSAC members for their participation and sacrifice to the community. When selecting members, the City Commission was looking for diversity and those that took an interest in the public safety levy, whether for or against it.

PSAC Chair Guynn expressed appreciation to City Manager Greg Doyon and his team for their efforts with regard to putting together a draft summary of Committee Members broad recommendations as set forth in the draft document titled “Executive Summary, Great Falls Public Safety Advisory Committee, August 21, 2024.”

City Manager Doyon clarified that the draft summary was a consolidation of statements that were made by individual PSAC members when responding to primary areas in the Resolution.

PSAC Chair Guynn read each section of the draft document individually. After lengthy discussion, clarification from PSAC Members about certain recommendations and staff clarification, the PSAC agreed, or in some instances a majority of the PSAC agreed, to make the following amendments to the draft document, which removes any language indicated by a ~~strike out~~ and adds language which is **bolded and italicized**, as follows:

## **Introduction**

~~The Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) recognizes that safety is vital for the entire community and recognizes the challenge of gaining public support for funding.~~

~~PSAC encourages the City Commission to support a responsive and effective public safety team with community support and engagement.~~

## **1. Recommended Priorities for Public Safety**

### **Broad Priorities**

#### **~~1. Police is the most important Public Safety Priority~~**

#### **~~2. Improve Communications and Cooperation with the Native American Population~~**

- ~~• Calls for better relations and understanding between the Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) and the Native American community, referencing incidents that raise concerns.~~

#### **~~3. Adopt a Zero Tolerance Policy for Homeless Encampments~~**

- ~~• Recommend strict enforcement to prevent homeless encampments within city limits, reflecting public frustration over past situations.~~

#### **~~4. Enhance Officer Training and Action~~**

- ~~• PSAC urges GFPD officers to do more than just "show up" and should actively address situations rather than claiming nothing can be done.~~

#### **~~5. Enforce Accountability for Public Interference in Law Enforcement Actions~~**

- ~~• PSAC suggests charging bystanders who interfere with police operations to avoid setting a precedent that such behavior is acceptable.~~

- The Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) recognizes that safety is vital for the entire community and recognizes the challenge of gaining public support for funding.*
- PSAC encourages the City Commission to support a responsive and effective public safety team with community support and engagement.*

## **2. Recommended Priorities for Police, Fire, Court, and Legal Departments**

### **1. Police Department Priorities**

- **Visible and Proactive Policing:** Focus on crime prevention with quick response times.
- **Increase Personnel:**
  - Add *approximately* 14 patrol officers
  - Add 2 investigators, and 2 dispatchers
- **Focus Areas:**
  - Enhance School Resource Officers (SROs) programs.
  - Improve dispatch capabilities.
  - *Actively Engage* with the community ~~more actively~~.
  - Regularly publish a crime blotter for public information.
- **Improved Communication:** Ensure the public is better informed and engaged regarding incidents and safety issues.
  - Use targeted community surveys to illicit community feedback and improve general data and analytics to answer various questions

### **2. Fire Department Priorities**

- **Prevention and Education:** Focus on fire prevention education and life safety, including first aid.
- **Increase Personnel:**
  - Add *approximately* 16 firefighters ~~to staff a second company at the downtown fire station~~.
  - Add 1 fire prevention personnel.
- **Expand Facilities:**
  - Plan for a future ~~additional~~ fire stations *as needed*.
- **Engage the Community:** Emphasize public involvement and education through school programs and a training center.

### **3. Court and Legal Department Priorities**

- **Timely Legal Resolutions:** Prioritize efficient and effective handling of legal matters.
- **Increase Personnel:**
  - Add 1 jury clerk and 1 courtroom clerk in the municipal court.
  - Add 1 prosecutor and 1 victim/witness coordinator in the city attorney's office.
- **Support Programs:**
  - Implement a volunteer program.
  - Enhance public education and victim awareness advocacy.

### **4. General Public Safety Recommendations**

- **Community Feedback and Data-Driven Decisions:** *Encourage Bboth* GFRD and GFRR ~~should~~ *to* conduct regular community surveys for better data analytics and targeted improvements.
- **Crime Problem Analysis:** Use data to address ~~why Great Falls has a larger crime problem compared to other Montana cities~~ *issues in Great Falls*.
- **Mental Health and Social Worker Integration:**
  - Contract with mental health and social work professionals to handle some disturbance calls more efficiently.
  - ~~Explore~~ *Encourage* the creation of a crisis center similar to those in other regions to prevent certain types of disturbance calls.

### **5. Fireworks Ordinance**

- ~~Delegate decision-making authority on fireworks to the fire chief and city manager based on fire danger and weather conditions.~~
- ~~Increase fines for ordinance violations.~~

### **6. Restitution Priority**

- ~~Prioritize restitution to crime victims before city fines and court fees are paid, to show better support for victims. Investigate potential legal flexibility in the Montana Code Annotated regarding this matter.~~

## **3. Strategies for Funding Public Safety Priorities**

### **1. Expand and Diversify Revenue Sources**

- ~~Increase the Tax Base:~~ Encourage primary sector industries to expand the local economy.
- **Grants and Tax Adjustments:** ~~Continue using grants and redirect limited property tax funds toward public safety.~~ *Encourage the City to achieve grants to help fund public safety priorities.*
- **Levy Options:**
  - As a last resort, consider asking citizens for a public safety levy ~~in early 2026~~.

### **2. Library Funding Drawback**

- **Reevaluate Library Funding:** Explore *up to* a 7-mill drawback ~~to free up \$1M from of~~ library funding, which could be redirected to public safety and court needs.
- ~~Prioritization:~~ Recognize the importance of public safety over non-essential services like library expansion, given current funding constraints.

### **3. Revise Levy Requests**

- **Separate Agency Levies:** *Consider Bbreaking* down future levy requests by individual departments (e.g., fire, police, and courts) rather than multi-agency levies.

- **Reduced Ask:** Acknowledge voter resistance to previous levy amounts by making future requests smaller and more specific.
- ~~**Clear Promises:** Require departments to provide clear, measurable outcomes when requesting funds (e.g., lower crime rates or improved ISO scores).~~
- ~~Sunset future levy approvals after a set number of years~~

#### 4. Re-evaluation of Economic Development Tools

- **Review Tax Increment Financing District Usage**
  - **Retire Underperforming TIF Districts:** Terminate TIF districts that do not meet their objectives within a reasonable timeframe and avoid creating new ones.
  - **Sunset Underperforming TIFs:** Set clear timelines for terminating underperforming TIF districts.
  - ~~**Fee in Lieu of Taxes:** Charge businesses within TIF districts a fee for public safety to balance the tax burden across the city.~~
- **Reconsider Tax Abatements:** Assess the fairness of abatements, especially for businesses that protest property taxes.
  - Consider a quicker exit plan when using these tools

#### 5. More Efficient Use of Existing Funds

- **Shift CDBG Money:** Redirect Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from local nonprofits to city needs, freeing up general funds for public safety.
- ~~**Eliminate Non-Essential Expenditures:** Identify and reduce unnecessary city expenses to allocate more funds for public safety.~~
- ~~Adopt local option tax for marijuana sales~~
  - Earmark all *marijuana* revenues for Public Safety
  - Ask *the* State Legislature to increase ~~tax~~ *the amount of marijuana tax revenue that is sent back to municipalities*

#### 6. ~~State-Level Advocacy and Legislative Action~~

- **Taxation Reform:** Lobby the state for changes that spread the tax burden more equitably, focusing on residential property taxpayers.
- ~~**Property Tax and Criminal Justice Reform:** Advocate for state action on property tax reform and changes to the criminal justice system that reduce the burden on local courts and prisons.~~

#### 7. ~~Fee-for-Service Models~~

- ~~**Increase Service Fees:** Implement or raise fees for fire/business licenses and nuisance calls to cover costs.~~
- ~~**Private EMS Contracting:** Encourage the use of private EMS services to reduce costs for non-emergency medical situations.~~

### ~~8. Inter-Agency Coordination and Resource Sharing~~

- ~~• **Law Enforcement Collaboration:** Improve coordination between city and county law enforcement to avoid redundancy and confusion.~~
- ~~• **Shared Services:** Explore partnerships with other agencies (e.g., CCSO, MTHP, military bases) to share resources and reduce costs.~~

### ~~9. Stagger Levy Request and Timing~~

- ~~• **Staggered Levy Requests:** Space out levy requests for different departments (court, legal, police, fire) over several years for better voter acceptance.~~

### ~~10. New Funding Mechanisms and Partnerships~~

- ~~• **Explore Legal Options:** Investigate available legal funding mechanisms and partnerships, such as collaborating with the Little Shell Tribe for shared public safety responsibilities.~~

### ~~11. Inflation and Timing Considerations~~

- ~~• **Delay New Levies during Inflation:** Given the current high inflation, hold off on asking for new levies until economic conditions stabilize.~~
- ~~• **Taxpayer Prioritization:** Focus on needs over wants, ensuring that public safety is funded before non-essential services like library expansions.~~
- ~~• **Audit the Federal Reserve using State Constitutional powers/authority**~~

### ~~12. Monitor Overtime Usage in Public Safety Departments~~

## 4. Recommended Strategies for Engaging a Broad Spectrum of Community Members and Businesses

### ~~1. Promote Community Advocacy and Leadership~~

- ~~• **Encourage Local Advocacy Organizations:** Support the formation of a local advocacy group dedicated to promoting public safety solutions.~~
- ~~• **Community Leadership Role:** Take proactive leadership in promoting solutions, engaging diverse voices, and facilitating public safety discussions.~~

### ~~2. Polling and Surveys~~

- ~~• **Volunteer-Based Outreach for Polling:**
  - ~~○ Create a commission to develop a cost-effective survey strategy, including a “door-knocking” campaign by 15-20 community leaders to gather statistically meaningful feedback.~~~~
- ~~• **Contracted In-Depth Survey:**~~

- ~~○ Conduct a citywide, scientifically significant survey probing residents' opinions on public safety services, costs, and potential tax support.~~
- ~~○ Ensure the survey includes open-ended questions and avoids biased assumptions.~~
- **Survey Considerations:**
  - ~~○ Recognize the community's financial constraints and avoid expensive formal polling that might diminish taxpayer trust.~~
- *The City encourage a private entity to conduct a citywide, scientifically significant survey probing residents' opinions on public safety issues, costs, and potential tax support and to ensure the survey includes open-minded questions and avoids biased assumptions.*

### **3. Educational Outreach and Consequence-Oriented Communication**

- **Public Safety Awareness Campaigns:**
  - ~~○ Develop outreach programs that clearly communicate the consequences of insufficient funding for public safety.~~
  - ~~○ Encourage city agencies to include consequence-oriented messaging while remaining compliant with legal restrictions on advocacy.~~
- **Retool Neighborhood Councils:**
  - ~~○ Shift neighborhood councils from formal government bodies to active "field teams" focusing on grassroots engagement like "street meets" instead of traditional council meetings.~~

### **4. Independent Advocacy and Community Feedback Mechanisms**

- **Promote Citizen Advocacy Groups:**
  - ~~Support~~ *Encourage* the formation of independent citizen advocacy groups that can take on public safety initiatives and fundraising efforts.
- **Public Safety Advisory ~~Commission~~ Board:**
  - Consider establishing a permanent Public Safety Advisory ~~Commission~~ *Board* with rotating city officials and community members to listen to concerns and provide recommendations.
- **Annual Citizens Forum:**
  - Organize an annual "Council of Councils" forum dedicated to discussing public safety, gathering feedback, and fostering collaboration among community groups.

### **5. Engage the Community and Address Misinformation**

- **Community Education Campaigns:**
  - ~~○ Educate citizens on city funding processes to correct misconceptions (e.g., funds for cultural projects like theater renovations versus public safety needs).~~
  - ~~○ City Public Safety leadership should listen to citizen comments and concerns.~~
- **Foster a Culture of Listening:**
  - ~~○ Actively listen to community concerns without dismissing them as uninformed, ensuring constructive dialogue and engagement.~~

• ~~— Avoid Overreliance on Focus Groups:~~

- ~~Broaden engagement beyond selective focus groups to ensure diverse input, avoiding bias from hand-picked participants or narrowly defined envisioning sessions.~~

~~6. Avoid Costly Taxpayer-Funded Promotion~~

• ~~— Limit Taxpayer Spending on Promotion:~~

- ~~Avoid using taxpayer money for campaigns perceived as promotional, which could alienate citizens and diminish trust.~~

• ~~— Explore Non-Taxpayer-Funded Alternatives:~~

- ~~Leverage community organizations and volunteer-driven initiatives for survey funding and public outreach.~~

**7. Lobbying for Legislative Support**

• **Develop a Lobbying Agenda:**

- Formulate clear lobbying recommendations for state and federal action on issues that impact public safety funding and policy, targeting the 2025 legislative session.

**MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM COMMITTEE**

None.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Al Rollo**, City resident, expressed concern about 2.2 – Fire Department Priorities, with regard to contracted areas outside of the City limits taking away from coverage in the City.

With regard to 2.4, General Public Safety Recommendations, Mr. Rollo reported that there was a volunteer group that had a crisis center that was funded through grants. The PSAC might want to consider why the crisis center failed, and suggested it may be healthy to go back and learn from the past.

Referring to Section 3, Strategies for Funding Public Safety Priorities, Mr. Rollo commented that it would be helpful for the City to break out the budget of fire, police, courts and others in the tax list that goes out with the County tax bills so citizens know where their funding is being spent in those areas.

Referring to 3.6, State-Level Advocacy and Legislative Action - Taxation Reform, Mr. Rollo expressed he is most concerned about getting the City and this Committee to push through the legislators that we need to have a positive change to modify the taxes for the citizens that reduces the tax burden on the individual taxpayers so they can support public safety. He urged the City and Committee to go on record and support a way of resolving the equity issue.



PSAC Chair Guynn responded that Mr. Rollo's request about property tax relief could be added under 7, Lobbying for Legislative Support.

PSAC Member Weissman further responded that 3.6, State-Level Advocacy and Legislative Action was eliminated because it was outside the purview of the PSAC.

PSAC Member Nikolakakos added that most of the discussion at the August 21, 2024 City, County and Local/Regional Legislators Meeting was about tax policy and legislators are aware of the issue.

It was the consensus of the PSAC to add 3.6, State-Level Advocacy and Legislative Action - Taxation Reform back into the PSAC Draft Summary of Recommendations.

**Keith Duncan**, City resident, expressed appreciation to the PSAC for their time, effort and thinking outside the box. Mr. Duncan suggested that the City Commission devise a program where citizens could be recruited to lobby the legislature. Mr. Duncan suggested the following for more consideration:

- A 7-mill drawback from library funding be redirected to public safety, because public safety is a higher priority.
- Retire or terminate TIF districts.
- Work with the legislature so non-profits that have revenue and property are paying a user fee or a payment in lieu of taxes.
- Work with the legislature to claw back some of the tax money from marijuana sales.

**Susie McIntyre**, Great Falls Public Library Director, expressed appreciation to the PSAC for its efforts with regard to improving public safety. Referring to one of the PSAC recommendations, Ms. McIntyre read from a prepared handout and expressed opposition to a 7-mill drawback from library funding to provide funding for public safety. Ms. McIntyre believes that a healthy City needs good schools, libraries, parks and public safety and that those important services should not be pitted one against the other. The City is currently negotiating with the Library Board with regard to the organizational structure and funding.

PSAC Chair Guynn inquired if the PSAC wanted to reconsider any aspect of the strategies of item 2, funding public safety priorities – library funding drawback.

PSAC Member Weismann expressed opposition to reevaluating library funding.

PSAC Member McKamey commented that negotiations are already underway and negotiations should be allowed to proceed.

It was the consensus of the majority of the Committee to keep the language “explore drawing back up to seven (7) mills from the Great Falls Public Library” as a recommendation.

**Susan Wolff**, City resident, thanked fellow commissioners for serving on the PSAC. She also expressed appreciation to city staff and Police, Fire, Court and Legal departments, who have given

a lot of time after giving a year and a half of time on the public safety mill levy and bond issue, as well as to the PSAC for their dedicated service.

PSAC Chair Guynn commented it has been an honor and privilege to be the chair of this committee. She expressed appreciation for the PSAC members' dedication to the community.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Public Safety Advisory Committee, PSAC Member Dodd moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, to adjourn the regular meeting of August 21, 2024, at 9:04 p.m.

Motion carried 8-0.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson Sandra Guynn reviewed and approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2024.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Acting Secretary – Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea