

PUBLIC SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS
(In no particular order)

Task #1: Recommend priorities for public safety

A. Work harder to improve communications and cooperation with the Native American population of Great Falls.

Several incidents I have heard about call into question for me the ability of GFPD to interact successfully with that population, in particular, an incident at the senior center.

B. Adopt a zero tolerance policy for homeless encampments within city limits.

Many city residents were outraged that the downtown homeless encampment was allowed to continue for so long. It negatively affected neighborhood homeowners and business owners.

C. Train officers that they need to do more than just show up. In other words, do something instead of claiming there's nothing that can be done. When the public experiences this inaction by the police, whatever the reason, it leads to the public losing respect for the GFPD.

The problem the public sees (from comments I've heard and my own personal experience) isn't failure to respond to calls due to lack of officers but instead, the public sees officers showing up and doing little to nothing.

Three vehicles were totaled one night in front of our house in one incident by a drunk driver and the responding GFPD officers basically told us all that there wasn't anything they could do aside from filing a report.

That is, until I told them that if they weren't going to do anything, I would personally follow the trail of antifreeze left by the drunk driver's vehicle and apprehend the perpetrator myself because he wasn't going to get far with that kind of damage. I shouldn't have had to say that just to get the officers to take action.

That was years ago but the fact it continues to this day indicates an issue with LE culture. I am still hearing first person accounts where GFPD officers have shown

up and then claimed there's nothing they can do. Accounts of incidents have come to me from employees at businesses and from individuals.

There was also an incident, I believe last year, with the GFPD apprehending someone with a warrant at a local motel that was publicized by a video on Facebook. In the video, it was obvious that bystanders were interfering with the officers.

When I asked the Chief Newton about this, he indicated none of the bystanders were charged. It seems to me that not charging those bystanders just signals to the public that it is okay to interfere with officers in their official capacity. It is the wrong message to send to the public, in my opinion.

Task #2: Recommend priorities for Police, Fire, Court and Legal departments

A. Communication from city public safety departments should be a priority but currently, communication to the public is extremely poor. Failure of police and fire to keep the public informed and engaged leads to lack of support from the public.

Great Falls residents find out very little about incidents because police and fire don't report outcomes to the public and the city has also failed to respond to information requests regarding those departments. To be clear, I'm not referring to ongoing investigations where there's a necessity to keep things under wraps.

The public wants to know what has happened in police and fire incidents. If you don't engage the public by letting them know what has happened, you don't create an environment where residents feel they are stakeholders. Therefore, you will continue to get no buy-in from taxpayers for additional funding.

The website listed for information on GFPD web page, www.crimemapping.com, is difficult to use and provides limited information. There are also no instructions on that website on how to zoom out to see all of Great Falls, so there is no way to get the overall picture of crime for the city. It also only includes six months of data.

I was referred to the GFPD Facebook page for information and I was told information was posted when it was not posted. Again, that is miscommunication.

Shortly after GFPD assisted the IRS and ATF with the raid on Highwood Creek Outfitters, I submitted a formal information request to the City of Great Falls for the oath of office taken by GFPD officers. The city has yet to fulfill that request but instead responded irrelevantly.

A former coworker died in a fire, apparently while in his vehicle, which then caught his house on fire and burned his house down. I say apparently because we heard very little about the incident and absolutely nothing about the investigation.

B. The City of Great Falls and City Court should make it a priority that when the perpetrator of a crime is determined guilty and the crime involved property damage or personal injury, the damaged party (victim) should receive restitution BEFORE the city fines and court fees are paid, not after.

I know from experience that victims must wait until the city court and city fines are paid to begin receiving restitution from the perpetrator of a crime. **That gives the appearance that the City of Great Falls cares little about crime victims.**

When I mentioned this during the presentations, it seems to me the legal department indicated that it was out of their hands that the fines and fees are paid first, but I haven't found anything in the Montana Code Annotated that claims city courts and city fines must be paid before victim restitution.

Additionally, *Montana Code Annotated 46-24-201, Services to victims of crime*, lists a number of actions required by law enforcement, most of which were ignored by Great Falls Law Enforcement in my family's experiences as crime victims.

Task #3: Recommend strategies for funding public safety priorities

A. Dissolve the 1993 agreement with the library for 7 mills and return those funds to the general fund to fund public safety.

The library received more than their ask. Public safety in any civilized society is a NEED, a library, especially an expansion of the library, is a WANT, **so the city needs to learn how to prioritize.**

B. Retire TIF districts and don't create any new TIF districts.

TIF districts shift the burden of funding city services including public safety, to property owners not in TIFs and is inherently unfair.

C. Use the maximum amount of Community Development Block Grant money for city needs, instead of funneling those monies to area nonprofits.

This will free up other city funds for public safety. Taxpayers are beginning to recognize the additional burden created for them when the city chooses to fund their nongovernmental organization (NGO) “partners” over taking care of city needs first. The city past and current use of CDBG funds has and continues to be unfair because the city’s first responsibility should be with Great Falls residents as a whole, not special interest NGOs.

D. Charge a fee in lieu of taxes for public safety to businesses and properties within TIF districts.

This would help alleviate the unreasonable and unfair burden to homeowners outside of those districts that are having to pay more in taxes to cover the loss of revenue from the TIF districts that helps fund public safety.

E. No new levies until inflation is resolved.

The highest inflationary period in more than four decades is not the time to ask the voters for tax increases through levies. Taxpayers don’t have the ability to levy their employers for more money.

Even for those that may think the levies are justified — if they can’t afford it — **THEY CAN’T AFFORD IT, PERIOD.**

Also, stop the false rhetoric by city officials and the city commission that our tax woes are primarily due to the state taxation law. Local governments set their budgets and set the mills levied, so the city’s denial of culpability is dishonest.

Task #4: Recommend strategies to engage a broad spectrum of community members and businesses.

A. Listen to community members instead of just dismissing their comments and labelling their concerns as whining, uninformed, irrelevant or ignorant.

It has been my experience and the experience of many Great Falls residents I've spoke with both during and after the levy process, that when making suggestions to law enforcement or fire, you are immediately dismissed. This should not be the case.

B. Don't spend taxpayer money to "educate" (promote) a public safety levy.

Many Great Falls residents were angry that the city spent \$150,000 of taxpayer money with Wendt to promote the levy.

C. Don't focus solely on "focus groups" and "envisioning" for feedback and decision making.

You don't reach a full range of Great Falls citizens using focus groups. There's no scientific basis for the hand-picked selection of these city focus groups which appear to dominate the "public" input that the city uses in its decision making.

Ditto with various "envisioning" sessions the city has had over the years, which again, have dominated city decision making. I have personally witnessed these meeting where the Delphi Technique (look it up) was applied and the subsequent "conclusions" used to justify city decisions.

D. Consider creating a permanent Public Safety Advisory Commission or Board consisting of interested Great Falls citizens. Include an ex-officio city commissioner member, and rotate in city public safety supervisors to listen to citizen comments and concerns.