

# JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

March 18, 2025

Regular City Commission Meeting

Mayor Reeves presiding  
Commission Chambers, Room 206

**CALL TO ORDER:** 7:00 PM

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

**ROLL CALL/STAFF INTRODUCTIONS:** City Commission members present: Cory Reeves, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, Shannon Wilson, and Susan Wolff. Also present were City Manager Greg Doyon, Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, City Attorney David Dennis, Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** There were no proposed changes to the agenda by the City Manager or City Commission. The Agenda was approved as presented.

**CONFLICT DISCLOSURE/EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:** None.

## COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

### 1. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM GREAT FALLS AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

**Ed Brown**, President and CEO of the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, updated the Commission on his first nine months with the Chamber and plans for the future. The goal of the past nine months has been digging in to what value business members want and see from their membership, how the Chamber can build upon that value, and what can businesses do to help the Chamber help the City of Great Falls and the community we are all a part of.

He has participated in video chats on social media on multiple topics, such as parking, growth policy, downtown TIF, and an initiative to lower the cost of airfare. Answers to questions from members and non-members are provided from the experts in the room. It is important to showcase what is in our community and who the Chamber members are.

An upcoming event will be to engage the Leadership Great Falls alumni to strengthen that program even more. His goal is to bring more of our community and more leadership principles to that group.

In conclusion, Mr. Brown announced that a luncheon would be scheduled in May regarding the State of Great Falls. Leaders in the community will present for five minutes followed by lunch and then a question and answer period.

## PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

2. **John Hubbard**, City resident, commented that the public safety levy failed because the Department of Revenue raised taxes 111%. He also discussed a tree falling on his house and car in December during a high wind event.

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## **NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS**

### **3. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

None.

## **BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

### **4. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

None.

## **CITY MANAGER**

### **5. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

City Manager Greg Doyon announced that the Deputy City Manager recruitment is underway with a recruiting firm. Legislators are back in session and the City's lobbyist is continuing to monitor several bills.

### **CONSENT AGENDA.**

- 6.** Minutes, March 4, 2025, City Commission Meeting.
- 7.** Total Expenditures of \$4,341,706 for the period of February 13, 2025 through February 26, 2025, to include claims over \$25,000, in the amount of \$3,648,503.
- 8.** Contracts List.
- 9.** Set a public hearing for April 15, 2025 on Resolution 10565, approving a Conditional Use Permit to allow a Contractor Yard, Type I, Land Use with an additional allowance of up to 2,500 square feet of temporary storage containers, upon the property addressed as 3104 Upper River Road, Great Falls, Montana.

**Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, that the City Commission approve the Consent Agenda as presented.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

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10. **RESOLUTION 10567, A REQUEST FROM MOUNTAIN VIEW EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH FOR A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT (CUP) TO EXPAND A NONCONFORMING USE TO CONSTRUCT A BUILDING ADDITION ONTO THE EXISTING CHURCH LOCATED IN THE R-2 ZONING DISTRICT UPON THE PROPERTY ADDRESSED AS 800 SACAJAWEA DRIVE.**

Mayor Reeves declared the public hearing open and asked for presentation of the staff report.

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that Mountain View Evangelical Lutheran Church submitted an application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to expand its non-conforming "worship facility" use at 800 Sacajawea Drive. When the church was built in the R-2 zoning district, this use was allowed before the district existed. When the district was implemented, it became legal, non-conforming and the City Code allows those uses to be grandfathered. Expansions to increase those non-conforming uses may be done through the conditional use permit process.

The proposed addition is designed to enhance the church's functionality for its current congregation that has remained steady since 1980, with an average membership of 40-60 congregants and the greater community. The majority of church services are held on Sundays, and members will continue to utilize the current twenty on-site parking spaces, which meets current City Code. Staff also believes there is sufficient off-street parking to satisfy the church's needs.

Neighborhood Council #3 met on February 6, 2025, and voted 3-0 in support of the proposed CUP. At the conclusion of a public hearing held on January 28, 2025, the Zoning Commission unanimously voted 4-0 to recommend that the City Commission approve the applicant's request for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to expand a nonconforming use and construct a building addition on the subject property. Concerns were expressed from the public about whether or not the expansion would infringe on the sight safety triangle for corner lots. The Building Department and zoning staff reviewed City Code and determined that it is in conformance.

The basis of decision was attached to the agenda report and meets all of the requirements.

**Applicant, Keith Gibbs**, Mountain View Evangelical Lutheran Church Council President, reported that the 2,334 square-foot addition to the existing church building would be constructed on the west side of the existing church building along 8th Street NE. The first floor (1,169 square feet) will be utilized for a fellowship hall and a pastor's office, while the basement area (1,165 square feet) will be designated as a transitional space.

The addition of the fellowship hall will help alleviate existing congestion in the church entryway and provide a space for members to gather before and after services. The new pastor's office will be located on the main floor to host counseling sessions and small meetings. The previous office was converted into handicap-accessible bathrooms in 2005 to meet building code requirements. The basement will be used for congregational meals and youth classrooms.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of Director Cherry or the applicant.

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Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of or in opposition to Resolution 10567.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10567, subject to the Conditions of Approval being fulfilled by the applicant.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner McKenney inquired and was informed that the CUP process took approximately four months. There was a delay in January due to the Neighborhood Council not meeting that month. He believes there should be a simpler and faster way to carry out these requests.

Director Cherry added that the growth policy update is the best opportunity to provide that feedback as expressed by Commissioner McKenney.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

11. **RESOLUTION 10575, A REQUEST FROM NORTHSIDE PROPERTIES LLC TO USE DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) DISTRICT FUNDS FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF ELEVATORS AND UPGRADE THE FIRE ALARM SYSTEM AT THE TIMES SQUARE BUILDING LOCATED AT 525 CENTRAL AVENUE.**

Mayor Reeves declared the public hearing open and asked for presentation of the staff report.

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that the current owner, Jason Stringer, Northside Properties LLC, purchased the multi-tenant Times Square Building located at 525 Central Avenue in October 2024. This building was constructed in 1929, and was combined with adjacent buildings in the early 1900s. In 1981, it was heavily renovated to its current appearance. The building is within the Central Business Historic District and has contributed to the commercial activity of Downtown for nearly 100 years.

The building is in great disrepair. Staff has been meeting with Mr. Stringer since he acquired the building. The total cost of rehabilitation will be more than \$1 million dollars. Applicant's request is for \$158,908.46 in TIF funds for the modernization of elevators and to upgrade the fire alarm system.

The applicant chose to apply for TIF funding through the approval of City Commission due to the aggregate amount requested exceeding the \$130,000 limit of the Downtown TIF Program awards reviewed and approved administratively by City staff.

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If the Commission approves the TIF request, staff projects that at the end of fiscal year 2025 there will be approximately \$2.4 million dollars of expendable cash in the fund. On an annual basis, as a reoccurring program, there is also \$500,000 that goes to the administrative programs that staff administers – Façade Program, Fire Alarm Program and Environmental Safety Program. That fund never gets totally utilized. Being close to the end of the fiscal year, and ample funds within the administrative budget, staff can utilize the existing funds in this line item of \$500,000 for funding the project.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the \$500,000 administrative program funds are TIF funds.

Director Cherry added that the project does meet the line item and is a more conservative approach. The requested TIF amount is \$158,908.46.

**Applicant, Jason Stringer**, commented that he purchased the property in October 2024. He is in the process of getting contractors and in discussions with City inspectors on what needs to be updated. The TIF request is to modernize the elevators and update the fire alarm system. He is also working on the boiler and cooling systems. The two buildings were brought together in about 1982 when the front glass was installed. He will be working on trying to get that glass replaced as well.

The multi-tenant building currently has 20 stores, and an art gallery. A coffee shop called Mug Shots is forthcoming. His plan is to bring the building back to life. He has participated in downtown events – New Year's Eve ball drop, Christmas Stroll, and Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day events. He allows vendors to utilize space without charge.

Applicant Stringer urged the Commission to approve the resolution that would allow him to continue with other projects, such as the windows.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of the Applicant or Director Cherry.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the TIF request of \$158,908.46 was for modernization of the elevators and fire alarm system only.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of Resolution 10575.

**Kellie Pierce**, Executive Director of the Business Improvement District (BID) and Board Chair for the Downtown Development Partnership (DDP), commented that this request was brought before the DDP and was fully supported because the Times Square building is an asset to downtown. The DDP is glad the building is under new ownership with someone that will take care of it. The BID has been able to fund several business incentive grants, which pay a month's rent for new tenants in the building with a signed one-year lease.

**Jake Clark**, Great Falls Development Alliance (GFDA), commented that this is an ideal project for the TIF funds as they are designed in these program buckets. The historic building, so prominent in downtown, has many generations of great memories and more to come. GFDA supports this great project.

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Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to Resolution 10575.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10575 to allow the use of up to \$158,908.46 in Downtown Urban Renewal District Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds, and approve the accompanying Development Agreement for the modernization of elevators and upgrade the fire alarm system at the Times Square Building located at 525 Central Avenue.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner Wolff thanked the applicant, and commented she had no idea the two historic buildings were brought together.

Commissioner Tryon commented that this is a good project and worthy of TIF funding approval. The core use of TIF was for public infrastructure, and was expanded to include projects such as this. This is a good project and he wished the applicant the best of luck.

Commissioner McKenney commented that Great Falls is growing in all areas of the community. Downtown is especially vital to the growth of Great Falls. When developers come in to Great Falls, they want to see a healthy and vibrant downtown. Downtown Great Falls has become an entertainment district and a small business district and has a lot of exciting activity. He thanked the applicant for taking a huge risk that will be good for the community.

Commissioner Wilson commented that this project benefits infrastructure for the public as a whole.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **12. CENTRAL AVENUE/3<sup>RD</sup> STREET DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS, PHASE 2 CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT. OF 1779.1**

Public Works Director Chris Gaub reported that agenda item 12 is the construction contract for Phase 2 of the Central Avenue/3<sup>rd</sup> Street Drainage Improvements project. This project will increase storm drain capacity and reduce downtown flooding as part of a multi-phase storm drainage project. Phase 2 will upsize the storm mains along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street South from Central Avenue to 2<sup>nd</sup> Alley South, and along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street South to 5<sup>th</sup> Street South. The water main and street will be replaced along 1st Avenue South from 3rd Street South to 5th Street South. Working these three utilities at once, the area will be disturbed once versus multiple times. Construction is scheduled for May through November of this year.

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There is no ideal time to perform this work, especially with our short construction season. This project will temporarily disrupt local businesses and downtown traffic. Closing the westbound 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South one-way is necessary for various portions of the project. The contractor will limit closures as much as possible, but closures will be necessary due to the nature of the work and due to the safety concerns of moving traffic through a large construction zone.

City staff has presented this project to downtown businesses adjacent to the construction, including the Great Falls Transit District and parking garages. City staff has also worked with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade coordinator to minimize parade disruptions. The contractor will limit construction work along the 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South parade route until after July 4<sup>th</sup>. The contractor will also clean and sweep the construction area to provide a safe parade route and will not work on the day of the parade.

Notification letters will be sent to affected businesses and residents once the contractor's schedule and construction phasing is finalized. City staff will meet with the Business Improvement District at their April meeting. A Pre-Construction meeting with the City, Contractor, Consultant and interested parties is scheduled for April. Once construction begins in May, City staff will have public outreach meetings twice a month to address concerns from businesses, residents, and the general public.

Three responsive bids were received ranging from just over \$3.35 million to just under \$3.8 million. All three bids were within the budgeted amount.

The storm drain work will be funded with approximately \$1.8 million in available ARPA funds, which must be spent by the end of 2025. Once APRA funds are exhausted, he anticipates utilizing \$350,000 in TIF funds for the remaining portion of the storm drain work. Street Funds will fund approximately \$150,000 in street improvements not directly associated with the storm drain work. The Water Utility Enterprise Funds will fund about \$1 million for the water main improvements.

Staff recommends the Commission award this construction contract to the low bidder, Capcon.

**Commissioner McKenney moved, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, that the City Commission award a contract in the amount of \$3,352,727 to Capcon, LLC for the Central Avenue/3<sup>rd</sup> Street Drainage Improvements Phase 2 project, and authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents and to make the payments.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public. Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner Wolff commented it would be good to get this project done. There has not been serious flooding in a while and is something we do not want.

Commissioner McKenney commented that these improvements need to be made and there is never a best time. However, it is going to affect this business district. He urged Director Gaub to speed this project up as a highest priority so as to limit the disruption to businesses.

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Commissioner Tryon added that it needs to be impressed upon Capcon, should the Commission award the contract, the importance of expediting this project, as it will affect the livelihoods of those businesses. He further added that access to businesses need to remain open as much as possible.

Commissioner Wolff thanked Director Gaub for already communicating with the businesses and has faith in his communications with Capcon.

City Manager Greg Doyon commented that it is a catch 22 as the businesses also have an expectation that the City fix the problem. There have been events in the area that have impacted businesses because the storm drainage system could not handle it. The project will cause an inconvenience but staff will try to expedite it as much as possible.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS**

#### **CITY COMMISSION**

#### **13. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Commissioner Wilson thanked Director Cherry for attending the monthly Veterans coffee social this morning, and for his interaction with the community as a whole.

#### **14. COMMISSION INITIATIVES.**

None.

#### **15. LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES.**

None.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, **Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Mayor Reeves, to adjourn the regular meeting of March 18, 2025, at 7:56 p.m.**

Motion carried 5-0.

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Mayor Cory Reeves

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City Clerk Lisa Kunz

**Minutes Approved: April 1, 2025**