

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**January 21, 2025**

City Commission Work Session  
Civic Center, Gibson Room 212

Mayor Reeves presiding

**CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM**

**CITY COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:** Cory Reeves, Susan Wolff, Rick Tryon, Joe McKenney, and Shannon Wilson.

**STAFF PRESENT:** City Manager Greg Doyon; Deputy City Attorney Rachel Taylor; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler; Park and Recreation Director Steve Herrig; Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry; Public Works Director Chris Gaub; Police Chief Jeff Newton; Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Captain Maren Reilly, Assistant Fire Chief/Operations Jeremy Virts and Deputy Chief/Training Jason Furr; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Ron Paulick**, City Resident, inquired about 2025 House Legislative bills, future reporting on lobbyist engagement with the Commission, the amount spent for the lobbyist firm and if there was a cap on that expenditure. Mr. Paulick added that citizens would like to participate in discussions about legislative bills not suitable for the City.

Responding to Mr. Paulick's inquiries, City Manager Doyon responded that he would provide an update about the engagement the City has had with lobbyist during the Manager's Report at the January 21, 2025 City Commission Meeting.

Mayor Reeves added that City staff would provide a cap amount to Mr. Paulick later.

**Lela Graham**, Chairperson of Housed Great Falls, commented that Housed Great Falls runs the cold weather drop in center at First United Methodist Church. She reported that the cold weather drop in at the Church was open nine nights in November, five nights in December, and all nights to date in January. In November and December, they averaged 23 people and 27 people so far in January. She invited the Commission to visit the drop in center to see what they do.

**1. AMENDMENT AND EXTENSION TO MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT WITH COURSECO, INC.**

Park and Recreation Director Steve Herrig introduced CourseCo President/CEO Michael Sharp and General Manager Jeff Stange. He reported that the Amendment and Second Extension of Anaconda Hills Golf Course and Eagle Falls Golf Club Management Agreement would extend the term for an additional five years. CourseCo would distribute \$50,000 to the City towards capital equipment/improvements for the first 5-year extension and another \$50,000 if the second five-year extension is agreed upon. CourseCo would build into the operational plan an identified process to pay down the golf debt through the budget. Since 2019, CourseCo has returned approximately \$1.3 million to the City, with \$80,000 of that being

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used for the Eagle Falls Tap House renovations, \$75,000 for golf carts and the Pasta Montana money going towards the golf debt. If at any time during the course of the agreement either party deems that the operation of two courses is not economically feasible, by mutual agreement, one course may be closed. The management fee paid by the City to CourseCo would increase to \$105,000 annually and the accounting fee would increase to \$29,000 annually.

Commissioner Wolff inquired about the number and demographics of users per golf course.

CourseCo President/CEO Sharp responded that there were approximately 50,000 users, 48,000 rounds of golf and others utilized the driving ranges, restaurant and attended community events.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that CourseCo would develop the budget to pay down the golf debt; however, it would be a City-owned budget.

Commissioner McKenney received clarification that any capital equipment/improvements would be determined by both the City and CourseCo. The first \$50,000 would go towards replacing golf carts and once the golf debt is paid down, a capital fund could be built for future improvements. An indoor simulator at Eagle Falls is being considered to create year round golf, food and beverage revenue.

Commissioner Wilson received clarification that the current golf carts are below the market standard and replacing them every five to seven years would be what the industry expects.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about the plan to pay down the golf debt and hiring for the facilities.

CourseCo President/CEO Sharp responded that when CourseCo took over the operations of the facilities six years ago, the golf debt was over \$1 million and the Pasta Montana proceeds brought it down to approximately \$380,000. The operations of both facilities has a net profit of approximately \$200,000 annually. A realistic timeline to pay off the golf debt would be up to five years and CourseCo hires and trains employees for the facilities.

**2. BNSF CALUMET RAIL EXPANSION PROJECT**

Public Works Director Chris Gaub reported that Calumet informed the City in December about the expansion project and BNSF wanting to close the 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE railroad crossing.

He reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint slides:

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## BNSF CALUMET RAIL EXPANSION PROJECT

January 2025

**PURPOSE: INFORM CITY COMMISSION**

\*\*\*SLIDES NOT PRE-COORDINATED WITH BNSF OR CALUMET

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### BNSF-CMR GOALS

- COMPLETE IN 18 TO 24 MONTHS (IDEAL: 12 MONTHS/DECEMBER 2025)
- EXPAND FROM 1 TO 3 TRACKS (MAP NEXT SLIDE)
- CLOSE 4<sup>TH</sup> ST NE CROSSING (3 TRACKS TOO DANGEROUS)
  - BNSF AUTHORITY: 30 DAYS' NOTICE
- ELIMINATE 1 SWITCH PER DAY - FROM 2 TO 1 (2-3 HRS/SWITCH)
  - BUSINESS EFFICIENCIES (STOPS PRODUCTION); DOLLARS SAVED
- BENEFITS TO CITY (PER BNSF/CALUMET):
  - ADDS RAIL CARS VERSUS TRUCKS (3 TRUCKS TO 1 RAIL CAR)
  - FEWER TRAIN HORNS: ELIMINATE 11 PM HORN
  - LESS DISRUPTION FROM FEWER RAIL SWITCHES
  - LESS TRUCK TRAFFIC ON ROADS (NOISE, SAFETY)
- MEETINGS WITH BNSF & CALUMET: 12/11/2024 (CALUMET INVITE), 1/9/2025 (CITY INVITE)

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### PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. 4<sup>TH</sup> ST NE RAIL CROSSING: CLOSE ROAD
2. START: EXPAND TO 3 TRACKS FROM 1 (START)
3. SKINNY 3 TRACKS BACK TO 1
4. WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT
5. STORMWATER OUTFALL
6. RIVERS EDGE TRAIL
7. FIREWORKS STAGING
8. WESTBANK PARK



BLUE LINE = 3 TRACKS

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### COGF AREAS OF CONCERN

1. 4<sup>TH</sup> ST NE:
  - ACCESS WWTP, SEPTAGE RECEIVING STATION
  - EMERGENCY/SPILL RESPONSE (FIRE DEP T)
  - WEST BANK PARK/RIVERS EDGE TRAIL
    - 4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY FIREWORKS SETUP/STAGING
    - SANITARY SEWER MAIN
  - CALUMET ACCESS:
    - SPILL/OUTFALL RESPONSE
    - MONITOR ENVIRONMENTAL WELLS AT WWTP
    - PRIVATE UTILITY LINE ACCESS (POWER, GAS...)
2. STORM DRAIN OUTFALL AT WEST BANK PARK
3. WEST BANK PARK
  - ADEQUATE SPACE FOR NEW ACCESS ROAD?
  - PLAYGROUND AND BATHROOM SAFETY/ACCESS
  - RIVERS EDGE TRAIL ACCESS
  - CITY UTILITY LINES: PAY ANNUAL ENCROACHMENT FEE (ON BNSF PROPERTY)



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### COGF CONCERN #1: 4TH ST NE RAIL CROSSING

- BNSF PROPERTY CUTS OFF CITY STREET
- 1960/1975 AGREEMENT ALLOWS ACCESS
  - CITY NOT IN COMPLIANCE
  - CITY MUST CONTROL ACCESS TO PUBLIC
  - BNSF ALLOWED TO CLOSE ACCESS WITH 30 DAYS NOTICE
  - AGREEMENT EXPIRES: N/A



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### COGF CONCERN #1: 4TH ST NE RAIL CROSSING

- ACCESS TO THE WWTP:
  - CITY EMPLOYEES (PW, PARK & REC, ETC)
  - VEOLIA EMPLOYEES
  - CHEMICAL DELIVERIES
  - REPUBLIC: SOLIDS REMOVAL ~4X PER DAY
  - CONTRACTORS/LARGE EQUIPMENT
  - PLANT MAINTENANCE
  - SEPTAGE RECEIVING STATION CUSTOMERS
  - 12 PERMITTED USERS
  - OPEN 7 DAYS/WK; 365 DAYS/YR
  - AVERAGE 4 TRIPS PER DAY
  - NO ALTERNATIVES IN CASCADE COUNTY
- LIMIT TO PUBLIC'S EASE OF ACCESS TO RIVERS EDGE TRAIL (PARKING LOT)



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### COGF CONCERN #2: STORMWATER OUTFALL

- 16<sup>TH</sup> AVE NW
  - EXTENDING/MOVING WOULD BE COSTLY
  - SPACE FOR 2 ADDITIONAL TRACKS AND NEW ACCESS ROAD?
  - MDT, DEQ, ETC INVOLVEMENT?



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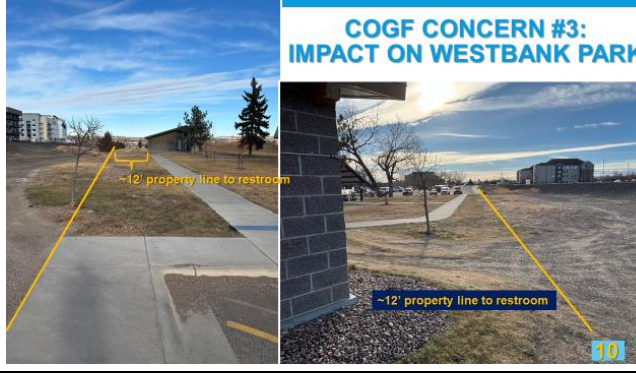
### COGF CONCERN #2: STORMWATER OUTFALL



DISTANCE BETWEEN CURRENT BNSF PROPERTY LINE & STORM DRAIN OUTLET = ~15'  
INADEQUATE SPACE TO BUILD A NEW ROAD

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<p align="center"><b>COGF CONCERN #3: IMPACT ON WESTBANK PARK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UTILITY LINES ON BNSF OR CITY PROPERTY?</li> <li>• GRAVEL ROAD FROM PARK TO 4<sup>TH</sup> ST NE             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRIMARILY ON BNSF PROPERTY</li> <li>• PARK &amp; REC EMPLOYEE ACCESS FOR MAINTENANCE</li> <li>• ACCESS FOR CITY SPONSORED ACTIVITIES (I.E. FIREWORKS DISPLAY)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• WEST BANK PARK PLAYGROUND             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAFETY IF ROAD IS SHIFTED – PROXIMITY TO CHILDREN</li> <li>• IF ROAD IS SHIFTED, WHO PAYS?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• ACCESS TO RESTROOM IN WEST BANK PARK             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RESTROOM ON BNSF LAND? (see next slide)</li> <li>• POWER LINE</li> <li>• WATER SERVICE LINE TO RESTROOM</li> <li>• IRRIGATION LINES</li> </ul> </li> </ul> 	<p align="center"><b>COGF CONCERN #3: IMPACT ON WESTBANK PARK</b></p> 
<p align="center"><b>OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION</b>  <b>***COSTS ARE NOTIONAL</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. INSTALL GATE WITH ACCESS CONTROL (SOUND/CHIMES AND/OR KEY PAD)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ROM COST \$2M</li> <li>• PROS: LEASER OF HIGH COSTS; RETAINS WEST BANK PARK SPACE; EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACCESS</li> <li>• CONS: RISK OF RAIL CARS BLOCKING GATE (PLANNED, UNPLANNED) I.E. DERAILMENT); LOSE PUBLIC PARKING FOR R.E. TRAIL</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. CONSTRUCT NEW ROAD FROM WEST BANK PARK TO WWTP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ROM COST \$5M</li> <li>• PROS: RETAINS OPTION OF PUBLIC VEHICLE ACCESS TO WEST BANK PARK</li> <li>• CONS:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VERY COSTLY; ELEVATE ABOVE FLOOD PLAIN; \$TORMWATER OUTFALL COSTLY TO BRIDGE; HANDLE HEAVY TRUCKS</li> <li>• ONE ACCESS ROUTE TO WWTP (EMERGENCY RESPONSE?); FLOOD PLAIN</li> <li>• LONG TRIP ROAD – 3+ MILES; EMERGENCY RESPONSE TIME; SANITATION TRUCK COST</li> <li>• PARK LOSES PARK LAND; CHANGES CHARACTER OF TIP DISTRICT &amp; WEST BANK PARK</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li><b>3. COMBINATION OF 1 AND 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ROM COST \$7M</li> <li>• GATE: IRREGULAR USE (I.E. EMERGENCY ACCESS, CONSTRUCTION ACCESS)</li> <li>• ROAD: REGULAR USE: DAILY EMPLOYEES, SANITATION, SEPTAGE CUSTOMERS, MAIL DELIVERY, ETC</li> <li>• PROS: SEGREGATES TRAFFIC BY FREQUENCY; INCREASED RAIL OPERATIONS SAFETY?; REDUNDANT ACCESS TO WWTP</li> <li>• CONS: MOST COSTLY INITIAL AND LONG-TERM; MOST COMPLEX</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p align="right">11</p>	

Mayor Reeves inquired who was responsible for the railroad crossing arms at the west end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North Bridge.

Public Works Director Gaub responded that BNSF would most likely be responsible.

Mayor Reeves further inquired why the City would be responsible for funding the arms at the 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE location.

City Manager Doyon responded that he would follow up with determining who would be responsible for funding of the 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE location.

Commissioner Wolff commented that whatever decision was made, economic development and the needs of the future should be considered.

Commissioner McKenney concurred with Commissioner Wolff's comment. He added that expansion and having an industry such as Calumet are good things for the City's tax base.

Commissioner Wilson commented that train horns are a big concern for Neighborhood Council 2. She received clarification that there was a collaborative discussion with BNSF about the 30-days' notice with regard to closing the 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE Crossing.

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Mayor Reeves added that there would be a quiet zone presentation at the January 28, 2025 Great Falls Citizens Council of Councils meeting.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about a timeline for making decisions and the Commission's role.

City Manager Doyon responded that the City needs access to the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) and 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE is the most reasonable access. The City has an active railyard with BNSF and he would appreciate BNSF and Calumet being mindful of the impact that is going to occur in Westbank Park and the surrounding area with regard to access and public use. He expressed concern with regard to accessing the WWTP if there was an emergency at the plant during a switch over. City Manager Doyon further responded that the Commission's role would be to come up with options to cover the cost. The City would also need to address the loss of public access and that Westbank Park would not be used the way it was intended to be. Calumet would have needed this capacity, even without the expansion. This situation has limited options and is expensive.

Commissioner Wolff commented that we need to keep Westbank Park because there was a lot of work that went into it and is heavily used.

**3. FIRE TRAINING CENTER CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Fire Chief Jeremy Jones provided and discussed a PPC Grade handout.

He reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint slides:



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### Training Center

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The GFFR Training Center was built in 1973.

- ❖ Very few improvements have been made to the infrastructure of the facility.
- ❖ In the late 80's, the burn building was condemned from live fire training due to asbestos.
- ❖ In the early 2000's we had failure of the asphalt in and around the training grounds.
- ❖ In 2019 we had a critical failure of the training tower leading to it not being able to be used for fire and high-rise operations (training).
- ❖ November 2024 the remaining two roof training props failed.
- ❖ Currently the class room and the Hazardous Material Rail car prop (donated by Steel Etc) is all that is available to be utilized at the 9.5 acre facility.

### Training Center

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- ❖ The Training Center is an example of having kicked the can down the road for too long.
- ❖ Much like the failure of Fire Station #4, the Training Center has reached the failure point and has resulted in unsafe training conditions for fire fighters, equipment and fire apparatus.
- ❖ The failure of the mill levy/bond reinforced that no solution to address personnel/resources is in the near future.
- ❖ We must be able to train the personnel we have today at the highest level possible in an attempt to maintain the level of service the community expects.
- ❖ GFFR currently has no way to train firefighters in fire/rescue operations or to train new hires moving forward.

### Training Center

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Previously attempted funding alternatives:

- ❖ Last legislative session, GFFR worked to secure state funding to upgrade the Training Center into a regional training facility but ended up being excluded from the final budget.
- ❖ Training Center did not qualify for ARPA allocation
- ❖ Training Center did not qualify for CDBG funding
- ❖ Training Center is not qualifying for FEMA/AFG funding
- ❖ Training Center was not included into the previous mill levy/bond discussion in an attempt to keep costs down
- ❖ Explored partnership with GFC-MSU in building a joint fire station/training center (failed when bond failed)

### Training Center

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Impact to the CoGF if nothing is done:

- ❖ Insurance Services Office (ISO) awards up to 9 total points for training and this is based on having a 3 or more story training facility located on 2 acres and having live fire capabilities.
- ❖ CoGF is scheduled to be audited again in 2026.
- ❖ If we do not address the lack of training, we may receive a score that will assist with another regression.
- ❖ Every move, up or down, the ISO rating matrix is directly correlated to a 10% cost to the ratepayer. Ex. Going from a ISO 3 to an ISO 4 will result in a 10% increase to the insurance premium.
- ❖ GFFR is on the cusp of assuming another regression if we are not able to fix the lack of training capabilities at the current training center.

### Training Center

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Our proposal:

- ❖ Invest in the future of public safety today. We must provide our current personnel and resources (police and fire) the ability to train to the highest standard possible.
- ❖ Allow for the City to pursue up to \$2.5 million in non-voted general obligation debt to reconstruct the training center that will address needs within GFFR and GFFD today.
- ❖ Refocus the vision of the training center to be an ALL public safety training facility and create a master plan of the site moving forward to address City needs into the future.

### Training Center

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Critical improvements: Asphalt/Concrete Repair

- ▶ Old asphalt will be torn out and replaced. Concrete Sidewalk in front of classroom building will be repaired.
- ▶ Cost: \$553,500




### Training Center

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### Training Center

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Critical improvements: Training Tower

- ▶ Due to the proposed cost of bringing the tower up to safety code and standards as well as maintaining it over the next several decades, it has been deemed more cost effective to remove(demo) the tower and replace it with a newer, updated, lower maintenance training prop.
- ▶ Cost: \$65,000





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<p><u>Training Center</u> 11</p> <p>Critical improvements: New Tower/Burn Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Several fire training structures have been identified as viable options to serve our training needs. These structures can be customized to serve GFFR and our specific training needs.</li><li>▶ Cost: \$1,212,000</li></ul>  <p>FTS CUSTOM SYSTEM 8</p>	<p><u>Training Center</u> 12</p> <p>Critical improvements: Multi-purpose training building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Two-story training building will get power, insulation and heat making it functional for additional training applications, including potential use by GFFR and CCSO for active shooter and other trainings.</li><li>▶ Cost: \$120,000</li></ul> 
<p><u>Training Center</u> 13</p> <p>Critical improvements: Classroom Building Upgrades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Exterior paint and repair</li><li>▶ Cost: \$14,000</li><li>▶ Updated plumbing; tie into city sewer system</li><li>▶ Cost: \$160,000</li></ul> 	<p><u>Training Center</u> 14</p> <p>Critical improvements: Master Plan Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Long term planning for future development of the property</li><li>▶ Cost: \$65,000</li></ul> 
<p>15</p> <p><b>Total Cost Projection for GFFR Training Center Projects: \$2,189,500</b></p>	

Fire Chief Jones commented that the ability to train firefighters in real world scenarios and a safe environment is crucial. At a minimum, critical improvements would be removing the old training tower, replacing asphalt and purchasing the training facility.

Commissioner Wolff inquired about the financial impact to the City and the length of time a loan would take to pay off.

Finance Director Melissa Kinzler responded that a \$2.5 million loan with a 6% interest rate would be approximately \$255,000 annually for 15 years. Currently, the interest rate is 5.75% through the Intercap Loan Program; however, it resets every year.

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Mayor Reeves inquired if funds from a bond could pay off a loan through the Intercap Loan Program, if the City were to go out for another levy and the bond passed.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that loans through the Intercap program would have the ability to prepay a debt.

Commissioner Tryon inquired where the money would come from to make those payments, what the impact would be to the taxpayers and if other grant opportunities or training facilities have been considered.

City Manager Doyon responded that the money would come from the general fund. The legislature is also trying to reformulate the amount of the inflationary factor. The City would be committing half of that towards the debt service; however, the new budget cycle and labor negotiations could impact that number. There is such a deficiency at the training center that it is directly affecting the ability to train fire personnel, keep them safe and be prepared. Great Falls Fire Rescue's (GFFR) priority has shifted to a critical and emergent need and this would be one option to take care of it. Currently, a loan would be manageable; however, there would be an impact to other general fund departments.

Fire Chief Jones added that every grant and option was pursued and exhausted. The fee for renting other training facilities is on the GFFR's fee schedule that will be forthcoming for Commission approval. Most Class One Cities must have a training center in order to receive an ISO rating. There could be one year of training if these issues are addressed before mid-summer, which means he could choose when to be audited in 2026.

Mayor Reeves commented that there needs to be a training facility for fire personnel. Hard decisions have to be made and if other non-performing funds need to be considered, then that is what has to be done.

Commissioner Wolff concurred with Mayor Reeve's comments. She inquired if the training facility could be stood up quickly, once an infrastructure was in place.

Fire Captain Reilly responded several companies that make these modular structures have been identified. They would set them up; however, it could take several months to get here, the training tower would need to be torn down and new asphalt poured before one could be brought in.

Commissioner McKenney commented that he was not going to kick this down the road again and would like to take this under advisement for a couple months in order to determine community support of another potential public safety levy.

Mayor Reeves disagreed with waiting a couple months and wants fire personnel to have the proper training to do their job and ensure their safety. He inquired if a bond could be used towards paying a loan off sooner.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that the City staff would have to seek advice from Bond Counsel because staff would have to word the bond issue very carefully.



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Mayor Reeves commented that even if a bond would not pass, the City needs to do the right thing for the right reason and that is to protect fire personnel and provide them with proper training.

Commissioner Wilson commented that she was working towards becoming an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and could not imagine not having training. It is very important to have a training center for fire personnel right away.

It was the consensus of the Commission to have City Manager Doyon start exploring options as soon as possible to make this come to fruition.

Commissioner Wolff commented that it is critical that the Commission provide this direction now because of the upcoming budget cycle. She has spent a lot of time with fire personnel and at the training center. If someone were to get hurt because they did not have adequate training, it could cost as much as doing these improvements.

**DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS**

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that the February 4, 2025 work session will consist of a downtown market assessment and strategy as well as a Title 5 code changes – business licenses/permits and SIC's update.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of January 21, 2025 at 6:51 p.m.