

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 4, 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; City Attorney David Dennis; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler; Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry; Public Works Director Chris Gaub; Police Chief Jeff Newton; Fire Chief Jeremy Jones; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Steve Grout, Golden Triangle Resource Council, expressed support of Montana Renewables going after sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production; however, the problem with SAF production is the wastewater. Golden Triangle Resource Council and Pondera County have urged Montana Renewable to build its own wastewater treatment facility. Montana Renewables recently received a \$1.4 billion loan guarantee from the Department of Energy and a part of the assessment that went with that was that Montana Renewables build a permanent water treatment facility on site. Montana Renewables has stopped shipping wastewater out of state and found a place in Idaho that would accept until it can get its water treatment facility built. While Montana Renewables awaits an EPA permit decision, it is a possibility that they might dump its wastewater in Pondera County. Mr. Grout expressed concern if the water the City sells to Montana Renewables is contaminated and dumped in Pondera County. He requested that the Commission make Montana Renewables commit to being a good neighbor.

Rick Cornellier, Neighborhood Council 6, commented he is representing a constituent who collected a petition in October 2021 to request the ability to do burn permits. Mr. Cornellier explained that Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) had suggested limiting the acreage size of a lot to one acre or larger to allow for a burning permit. There are 119 single-family dwelling lots in the City that are larger than one acre and 59 of those are in NC 6. There is a lot of vegetation on large lots and individuals in NC 6 have an expensive dumpster brought in, while their county neighbor can request a burn permit. NC 6 was annexed into the City and lost the ability to request burn permits.

1. DOWNTOWN MARKET DEMAND AND ECONOMIC VITALITY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Great Falls Development Alliance President/CEO Brett Doney introduced Great Falls Business Improvement District Executive Director Kellie Pierce, Downtown Business Development Officer Nicki Dallison and NeighborWorks Great Falls Executive Director Sherrie Arey.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

February 4, 2025

Mr. Doney commented that the City helped fund the Economic Development Strategy Study by sponsoring a Montana Department of Commerce Main Street application and providing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds.

Mr. Doney provided and discussed a Great Falls Development Alliance 2024-2026 Economic Development Strategy handout. He reviewed and discussed the following PowerPoint slides:

	
<h3 style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px;">Economic Vitality Strategy -- MainStreet Pillars</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality (GFDA) • Design (BID) • Promotion (DGFA) • Organization (DDP) <p style="font-style: italic; margin-top: 10px;">All four points of the community transformation strategy need to work together to build a thriving downtown</p>  <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 10px;">Great Falls Downtown Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy 2</p>	<h3 style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px;">Market Analysis</h3>  <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 10px;">Great Falls Downtown Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy 3</p>
<h3 style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px;">Economic Vitality: Building on Strengths</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue operating business attraction, retention, and expansion programs Continue operating and support expanding Small Business Development Center programs Continue to promote available funding sources that allow investors to bring historic buildings up to code and add housing in underutilized upper stories Increase educational efforts around funding, training, and other opportunities for business and workforce development Explore opportunities to increase funding for existing programs and find new funding streams <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 10px;">Great Falls Downtown Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy 4</p>	<h3 style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px;">Economic Vitality: Focus on Key Areas</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify catalyst sites for development Select priority areas for targeted investment Pursue projects on catalyst sites and/or within targeted investment areas to spur investment activity Work with the City to pursue the redevelopment of underutilized City-owned sites for housing Facilitate the full utilization of existing buildings by working with the City on shared parking arrangements <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 10px;">Great Falls Downtown Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy 5</p>

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

February 4, 2025

Economic Vitality: Training & Networking

- Partner with schools & institutions to **promote training and incubator or apprenticeship programs**
- Facilitate **business partnerships**
- Encourage entrepreneurship through **temporary or mobile activations**
- Promote **Downtown Great Falls opportunities** to developers active in higher-priced markets

Great Falls Downtown | Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy



Opportunity Sites

Housing on Underutilized Sites

- Concord Report shows high demand for new housing in Great Falls
- Infill housing in downtown & surrounding neighborhoods **promotes efficient use of resources, city services**
- Station Lofts demonstrates **demand for high quality rental housing** downtown
- Parking lot redevelopment** presents biggest opportunity in downtown core

The Station Lofts



Avg. Asking Rent: \$1,600 / \$2.24 PSF
Opened October 2024

Great Falls Downtown | Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy

Middle Housing: Neighborhood



722 N 4th Street, Coeur d'Alene, ID



618 Westgate Avenue, Bozeman, MT

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Townhomes: Transition & Neighborhood



Delaware Street Townhomes, Denver, CO



3132 N Spiceland Lane, Boise, ID

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Garden Apartments: Transition



Creek View Apartments, Greeley, CO



19th & Graf Apartments, Bozeman, MT

Great Falls Downtown | Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy

Podium-Style: Core Area



Old Town Lofts, Meridian, ID



Black Olive, Bozeman, MT

Great Falls Downtown | Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy

Parking Lots

- Parking Lots, particularly those that are **City-owned**, are **prime opportunities for housing and mixed-use development**
- Parking lot redevelopment does not require demolition of existing buildings or the relocation of tenants

Surface Parking Lots in Downtown Great Falls



Source: ICG

Great Falls Downtown | Market Demand Assessment & Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

February 4, 2025

Parking Lot Development: Precedents

One11 Lofts – Bozeman, MT (122 Units, ground floor amenities, garage parking)



Hearth on Broad – Boise, ID (161 units, ground floor retail, garage parking)



Source: CoStar

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14

Targeted Investment Areas

- Way to **prioritize how and where to allocate resources** to make the most impact
- Areas where there is **already significant investment** and activity, where **improvements will be most visible** by the public, as well as areas that are poised to **connect Downtown with the riverfront** or other key amenities
- Concentrating initial investments** in these target areas will allow them to act as a showcase

The 400 Block of Central Avenue in Downtown Great Falls



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15

Targeted Investment Areas: Precedents

Building Improvement Program – Beaverton, OR



Campus Martius Park – Detroit, MI



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16

Riverfront

- The Missouri River is Great Falls' biggest asset
- Lack of connection** between the riverfront and the core of the downtown shopping district
- GFDA and its partners should utilize programming, placemaking, and financial incentives to **bridge the gap between the river and the shopping and employment district**

Rivers Edge Trail Anniversary Celebration (2016)



Source: T&H Engineering

Great Falls Downtown | Market Demand Assessment & Economic Viability Transformation Strategy

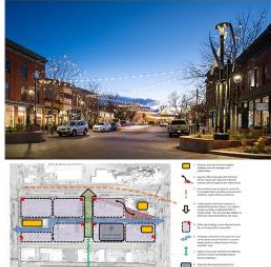
17

Riverfront: Precedents

Old Mill District – Bend, OR



River District – Fort Collins, CO



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18



JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 4, 2025



Mr. Doney reported that a full analysis was available on the Great Falls Development Alliance’s website and a lighting plan for downtown was performed.

Mayor Reeves expressed appreciation to Mr. Doney and other community partners for their efforts with regard to the community growth and moving the City in the right direction.

Commissioner Wilson inquired if there was any further discussion about public restrooms downtown and the Station Lofts at the Station District not filling quickly after being open for five months.

Mr. Doney responded that public restrooms downtown was not a part of the Economic Development Strategy Study and there are currently several public restrooms downtown. The Station Lofts have not been open for five months, a handful of units were occupiable and a year lease up is projected when a new property is opened. An article named Great Falls as one of the top places for rent increase in 2023 and the only way to stop the increase would be to increase the supply. He is optimistic that there will be more housing projects.

Commissioner Wolff commented that housing for teachers needed to be considered because their salaries are so low and downtown would be a good place to have something more affordable. She would love to see a permanent luminary walk using solar panels from Gibson Park to Westbank Park.

Mr. Doney responded that he is hopeful that developers and employers would utilize NeighborWorks Great Falls new Community Reinvestment Organization (CRO) program that targets affordable housing and homeownership opportunities for public servants.

Commissioner McKenney inquired about redeveloping under used City-owned sites for housing and utilizing existing buildings by working with the City on shared parking arrangements.

Mr. Doney responded that Westbank Landing would be an example of a shared parking arrangement with the City. Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry is very knowledgeable about the redevelopment of under used City-owned sites for housing. A Request for Proposals (RFP) would be evaluated with regard to what the benefits would be to the City.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 4, 2025

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the Commission could help GFDA by identifying downtown City properties that it would consider selling or leasing. The half block on 1st Avenue North could be a sizable development. The parking garages are an asset and tearing them down to use for development would not be justified.

Mayor Reeves expressed support of developing underutilized City-owned parking lots.

Commissioner Wolff mentioned that people would need to use the parking garages if development occurs on surface parking lots.

City Manager Greg Doyon reiterated that one-stop shops do not work and it is about getting people to the right spots. He explained that the City would need to be strategic about surface parking lots because once City property is sold, it is hard to get back and the code would need to be changed to be more agreeable to those types of purchases.

Commissioner Tryon inquired if City parks would be considered as underutilized City space.

Mr. Doney responded that there was a lot of vacant space downtown.

City Manager Doyon added that some of the parks have restrictions on them.

Mayor Reeves inquired if updating the code would be a priority.

City Manager Doyon responded that it would start with hearing from GFDA about what the parameters are in other communities that have been successful doing this.

Mr. Doney commented that GFDA would assist the City with regard to determining what other communities have done.

2. UPDATE ON GFFR FEES AND PROPOSED CHANGES TO SAFETY INSPECTION CERTIFICATE (SIC) PROGRAM

Mayor Reeves requested Fire Chief Jeremy Jones to provide more input about burn permits, based off the new information.

Fire Chief Jones reported that there was very little feedback from letters that were mailed out to approximately 3,500 businesses that GFFR provides SIC's to with regard to changing the name from a SIC to business license and proposed changes to the fee structure.

Commissioner Tryon commented that GFFR would probably receive feedback when those businesses receive their bill.

Fire Chief Jones explained that GFFR previously issued burn permits when the City went to the Lower River Road annexation and with the use of the Uniform Fire Code (UFC). There was no section in the

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 4, 2025

International Fire Code (IFC) that allowed for a permit process, since the adoption of the IFC 15 years ago. An update about Title 15 Code changes related to burn permits will be forthcoming at a work session. The Fire Prevention Bureau could determine the acreage size to allow burn permits.

3. CITY COMMISSION GOALS FOR 2025

City Manager Doyon reported that at the January 3, 2025 Retreat, the following were City Commission priorities:

- Review City Services
- Public Safety
- Community Development
- Communication/Education
- Legislative Presence

Mayor Reeves inquired about the process of determining what to do with the City services that are draining on the general fund.

City Manager Doyon responded that he could examine those areas that are not performing and come up with solutions for the Commission to consider. He previously asked Park and Recreation Director Steve Herrig to inquire if any current partners of the Multi Sports would be interested in leasing or committing to a field so the City could reduce what it is having to maintain. Another option would be to establish an advisory group; however, it would be a lengthy process because they would need to be oriented to the City's budget process in order to do their job properly.

Commissioner Wolff commented that the Great Falls School District is also facing budget challenges and hired a consultant to set guidelines to determine criteria for making hard choices. A rubric was also used at the Great Falls College MSU. She encouraged the Commission to consider doing this process differently than the Crime Task Force.

Mayor Reeves reported that the following were also discussed by the Commission:

- Focus on core-City services
- Whether the revenue gain by eliminating General Fund subsidies and/or closing or privatizing certain City services would be worth it
- The funds being subsidized by the General Fund should run like Enterprise Funds and the fee rates needed to cover the cost to be self-sustainable

Mayor Reeves suggested that City Manager Doyon examine the areas that are not performing and come up with solutions for the Commission to consider for this budget process.

Commissioner Wolff agreed with Mayor Reeves; however, the criteria with regard to making decisions needs to be data driven, rather than personal opinion.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 4, 2025

Commissioner McKenney commented that an advisory committee would be good for these types of discussions and decisions; however, it may not be implemented this budget year.

Commissioner Tryon commented that an advisory committee would not be helpful if the criteria needs to be data driven. The Commission is already aware of which non-performing enterprise funds receive subsidies from the General Fund. He suggested determining how much those services are being subsidized by the General Fund and how much could be saved by discontinuing those services. He also agreed that it might not be implemented this budget year.

Mayor Reeves commented that if the financial data was provided to the Commission, decisions could be made prior to June.

City Manager Doyon explained that the legislature, tax appeals and collective bargaining would affect the City's budget and the fund balance may be needed to set the budget straight. Data driven would need to include community input because citizens would be angry if this was rushed and there was not a major savings if City services were cut.

Commissioner McKenney agreed with Commissioner Tryon about making decisions after receiving financial data from City staff.

Commissioner Wilson commented that having an advisory committee would not be good in this case and the Commission needed to rely on department heads and community input.

It was the consensus of the Commission that City Manager Doyon provide financial data to the Commission before determining the next steps.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that the February 18, 2025 work session will consist of an annual update on library. A street OCI assessment review will be a topic at the April 15, 2025 work session.

Commissioner Wolff reported that Cascade County invited the City to provide a response by February 18, 2025 relating to Calumet Montana Refining's Tax Abatement request. She suggested meeting with the County and possibly Calumet at the February 18, 2025 work session or a special work session prior to February 18, 2025.

Mayor Reeves clarified that the County would be making the decision and it cannot deny the request.

Commissioner McKenney reported that he has been meeting with community leaders with regard to building community support for public safety.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of February 4, 2025 at 6:51 p.m.