

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**  
**June 3, 2025 -- Regular City Commission Meeting**  
**Civic Center Commission Chambers, Room 206 -- Mayor Reeves Presiding**

**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, Deputy City Manager Bryan Lockerby, Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry, Deputy Finance Director Kirsten Wavra, Utility Manager Laura Lynch, City Attorney David Dennis, Police Captain Doug Mahlum, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:**

There were no proposed changes to the agenda by the City Manager or City Commission. The Commission approved the Agenda as presented.

**CONFLICT DISCLOSURE/EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:**

Commissioner McKenney referred to Agenda Item 15 and recognized that, as a realtor who specializes in single-family residential properties, there could be a perceived conflict of interest. There is no direct personal or financial interest in the specific development project, and there is no actual conflict of interest. Therefore, he will participate in both the discussion and the vote on this item.

**MILITARY UPDATES**

**1. Miscellaneous Reports and announcements from Montana Air National Guard.**

Colonel Smith made the following announcements:

- General John Hronek's retirement is scheduled this weekend.
- The Blue Angels will be here for Montana Air National Guard (MANG) and Malmstrom Air Force Base (MAFB) open house August 13-14, 2027.

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- 156 airmen deployed to Africom for approximately four months. When they return, the C130H aircraft models will head out and then MANG will start accepting the J models.

### **PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

2. **Jeni Dodd**, City resident, read from a prepared statement in opposition to the City's purchase of property located at 5200 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North, which had been approved by the Commission at its May 6, 2025 meeting for the development of a future regional storm water pond. She expressed her opinion that the City Manager acted beyond his authority by entering into related agreements prior to formal ratification by the City Commission.

**Ron Paulick**, City resident, encouraged the City to promptly review and address concerns raised by Jeni Dodd, in order to correct any potential issues she identified. He also noted that it has been very difficult to obtain information about ongoing City projects. He expressed concern that the City Attorney's Office may be understaffed, which could be contributing to delays in providing information to the public. As a potential solution, he suggested that hiring a legal assistant or paralegal could help improve the timeliness and accessibility of information.

**Sherrie Arey**, NeighborWorks Great Falls, announced that NeighborWorks Week officially begins next week. A celebration is starting early with the presentation of the "Most Improved" awards. Ms. Arey outlined four upcoming project tours:

- Baatz Block Apartments – scheduled to open in September.
- Dream Street Tours – showcasing USDA Rural Development self-help homes near Meriwether Crossing and the Benefis area.
- Downtown Mural Tour – highlighting public art initiatives tied to community outreach.
- High School Houses & Small Apartments Tour – featuring student-built homes and small residential developments across the city.

**Gerry Jennings**, City resident, announced that June is Pride Month and recognized members of the community who are often underserved, yet contribute to the vibrancy and economy of Great Falls. She also voiced concern about the issue of homelessness in the city, noting that many of the unhoused individuals have education levels no higher than the third grade. She encouraged monetary support of public education aimed at helping the unhoused, emphasizing the importance of providing educational resources rather than relying on law enforcement as the primary response.

**Matt Taylor**, Mr. T's Electronics Etc., 528 Central Avenue, commented that downtown business owners are having difficulties with the unhoused population to one degree or another. He suggested putting more resources on the downtown streets and into maintaining the revitalization process to safeguard that progress.

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**John Hubbard**, downtown business owner, expressed concern over the increasing incidents of crime and violence in the downtown area. As a small business owner, he described the ongoing struggles he faces, particularly the harassment of his customers by unhoused individuals, which negatively affects his ability to operate and sustain his business. He noted that the rise in crime not only impacts his bottom line but also affects the safety and well-being of both his employees and patrons. Additional concerns were raised regarding individuals loitering and sleeping in doorways, along with broader public health and sanitation issues. Mr. Hubbard urged the Commission to allocate resources to support the revitalization of the downtown district.

**John Hubbard**, City resident, referenced a pamphlet he stated he had previously given to former Mayor Kelly. The pamphlet, according to Mr. Hubbard, outlines a claim involving a United Nations agenda allegedly aimed at eliminating two-thirds of the world's population through the use of poisonous vaccines.

**Chris Chumrau**, City resident, expressed appreciation for the work of first responders who help keep the community safe, stating that he currently feels safe living here. However, he voiced concerns about increased violence within the unhoused population. He encouraged a compassionate approach, suggesting that residents ask unhoused individuals what assistance they need rather than responding with violence. He recommended carrying pepper spray if an aggressive individual continues to pose a problem.

Mayor Reeves asked Captain Mahlum to address some of the concerns discussed about the unhoused in the downtown district.

Police Captain Doug Mahlum provided an update on recent discussions regarding concerns in the downtown area. He reported that the City has held very constructive meetings with downtown business owners, Municipal Court judges, the Sheriff's Office, and other key stakeholders who are directly impacted.

The City fully acknowledges the challenges currently taking place downtown and is preparing to implement a strategic response, expected to roll out by late Wednesday or Thursday morning. This plan will include the involvement of school resource officers during the summer months, as well as the City's direct enforcement team.

Captain Mahlum emphasized that while the issue cannot be addressed solely through policing, the City will take a firm and zero-tolerance approach to criminal behavior and lawlessness. He also acknowledged the deeper, underlying issues contributing to the situation—such as mental health struggles and substance abuse—and stated that the City is aware of and considering those factors as part of a broader response.

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### **NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS**

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

None.

### **BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

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

#### **5. APPOINTMENT TO THE LIBRARY BOARD.**

Mayor Reeves reported that the Library Board is comprised of five members who are appointed by the City Commission. The Board oversees the Library policies and operations including book policies and service to the City, County, and Pathfinder Federation of Libraries. Members serve for five-year terms, but no more than two full terms in succession, exclusive of time served on any unexpired term.

Ms. Crist submitted an updated application to be considered for an additional five-year term. In accordance with Resolution 10524, City staff advertised for the upcoming vacancy through May 20<sup>th</sup> and received applications from three new citizens.

Candidates were interviewed by the City Commission during a Special Work Session on June 3, 2025.

**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission reappoint Jessica Crist to the Library Board for a five-year term through June 30, 2030.**

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

Commissioners commented that all of the candidates were remarkable and qualified to serve on the board. The other three applicants were encouraged to find ways to serve the community or Library.

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

Motion carried 5-0.

### **CITY MANAGER**

#### **6. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

City Manager Greg Doyon provided an update on recent housing and community development initiatives:

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- The City was awarded a Pro Housing Grant from HUD through the Governor's Office, specifically via the Community Planning and Development Office. The grant amount totals approximately \$641,000.
- Eligible uses for the grant include developing, evaluating, and implementing housing policy plans and improving housing strategies. This opportunity was pursued with encouragement from the Montana League of Cities and Towns.
- The City plans to use the funds for:
  - Updating zoning ordinances,
  - Assisting with the current Growth Policy update,
  - Supporting a citywide soils analysis, which is important because poor soil conditions in Great Falls are a significant barrier to development.
- The City received the second highest award in Montana, with Kalispell receiving the highest.

### **Parking Update:**

- A reminder that the first two hours of parking are free in the North Parking Garage through August 31.
- After two hours, the rate is \$0.50 per hour, which is half the cost of on-street metered parking.
- All other parking policies remain unchanged.
- The garage is recommended for ease of use compared to downtown kiosks.

### **Workforce Housing and Downtown Development:**

- Staff are developing a proposal to utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to support workforce housing in downtown and urban renewal districts.
- Two recent open houses gathered input from community members, including downtown business owners, development professionals, and housing advocates.
- Staff plan to present a proposal to the City Commission in the coming months regarding amendments to allowable uses of TIF funding.

### **Public Safety and Homelessness:**

- Remarks on downtown public safety were acknowledged, highlighting ongoing conversations about public safety beyond just downtown.
- Resource allocation to one area often impacts other areas; addressing homelessness and related challenges remains complex.
- The City recognizes the difficulty in providing adequate resources and services to individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Efforts to shift and monitor resources to address these issues will continue, as homelessness and public safety remain key community concerns.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

7. Minutes, May 20, 2025, City Commission Meeting.

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8. Total Expenditures of \$3,912,311 for the period of May 1, 2025 through May 14, 2025, to include claims over \$25,000, in the amount of \$3,346,326.
9. Contracts List.
10. Award a contract in the amount of \$145,593.15 to United Materials of Great Falls, Inc. for the River Drive Trail Replacement project, and authorize the City Manager to execute the construction contract documents. **OF 1838.0**
11. Award a contract in the amount of \$126,888 to Smith River Construction, LLC, for the 10<sup>th</sup> Street Bridget remodel project, and authorize the City Manager to execute the construction contract documents. **OF 1790.0**

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, 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**

### **12. RESOLUTION 10574, ESTABLISHING RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL WATER, SEWER, AND STORM DRAIN UTILITY SERVICE RATES EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2025.**

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

Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Water Plant Manager Cody McRady and Utility Systems Manager Jake McKenna reviewed and discussed 2025 Utility Rate PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included:

- Inflation on energy, chemicals, materials and fuel utilized by Public Works has exponentially affected the City. Financing is only getting more expensive.
- \$2 billion capital replacement value.
- Certain regulations include the EPA's Lead & Copper rule revisions and improvements that could potentially levy costs on all rate payers.
- Aging infrastructure at the Water Treatment Plant (1916) and Wastewater Treatment Plant (1960).

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- Inflation has affected projects and repairs. Chlorine increased 300% over the last three years while other chemicals increased 30%-40%.
- Deferred \$8.5 million dollars of maintenance because rates were not raised for three years during Covid.
- DEQ's corrosion control plan.
- Calumet discharge – asking to convert from biological phosphorous removal to chemical removal and doubling or maybe tripling biosolids to landfill. Impact could drive City to replace 1.8 million linear feet of PVC pipe.
- Break even analysis (water) – not enough money is being put aside to pay for maintenance. There is a backlog of projects and prices keep going up.
- Break even analysis (wastewater), comparisons of an average monthly bill with the proposed 10% or 27% increase, ongoing projects at the Water Treatment Plant, ongoing projects at the Waste Water Treatment Plant, water main breaks from 1984 to 2024, commercial charges, materials cost due to inflation, water main taps, water capital needs and ongoing projects, sanitary sewer collection rehab and replacement, sewer capital needs, and storm drain capital needs.
- Comparison of nine Montana cities' water, sewer, and storm water combined rates; comparisons of several Montana cities' residential and commercial rates.
- Staff recommended a 10% average increase in utility rates at a prior work session, as well as presented some other options. One of the options was to help catch up to where the City should be on investing in our utility infrastructure, and another was to help the city invest in our system to improve it to better facilitate the current system as it stands as well as to facilitate development in Great Falls.
- Several top concerns of citizens that participated in the Growth Policy public engagement was aging infrastructure, and support for reinvesting in existing systems to enable responsible growth.
- Water Treatment Plant ongoing projects include the regulatory lead service line replacement, regulatory corrosion control, Hill 57 pump station upgrades, head house structural repairs, and chlorine onsite generation.
- Future capital needs include the basin repair and improvements, Water Rights Strategic Plan, head house repairs, chlorine onsite generation, high service operating adjustability improvements, alum tank storage consolidation, emergency power Water Treatment Plant improvements, and cost of development – growth management policy strategic decisions.

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- Wastewater Treatment Plant ongoing projects include Lift Station #4, Wastewater Treatment Plant side bar screen replacement, third centrifuge, Lift Station #1 and Lift Station #15. Future priority capital needs include additional centrifuge, bar screen replacement, Lift Stations #4, #15, #29, #30, #31 rehabilitation, and regulatory compliance projects driven by the EPA.
- Water Main breaks from 1984 – 2024. Extreme temperature swings and fluctuations in power supply to the water plant were accredited to the upswing in main breaks in 2022.
- 2013-2024 residential and commercial rate increases.
- Water capital needs – ongoing projects include 25 block of water main replacement (9 completed last year). It is projected 75-100 more phases depending on costs. Future priority capital needs includes a Water Master Plan, north side river crossing for water main, regulation accommodation and possible development. Without the replacement of aging infrastructure of the water main, breaks will continue to rise causing an increase in customer outages.
- 2013-2024 sanitary sewer collection rehab and replacement illustrates the proactive approach the City is taking to rehabilitate sewer mains and the costly repairs needing to be made in the meantime. One block of 8” sewer main to replace open trench is \$500,000 - \$1 million dollars; lining costs about \$20,000.
- Ongoing sewer capital needs includes the sewer lining projects, phases 23-28, with an estimated 75-100 more phases depending on costs. Future priority capital needs include Lift Station #1 upgrades, Missouri River Force Main Crossing, manhole rehab phase 7-11; estimated 90-125 more phases depending on costs, regulation accommodation – nutrient removal, and possible development.
- Ongoing storm drain capital needs includes the South Great Falls storm drain improvements project, Central/3<sup>rd</sup> Street drainage construction phase I-IV, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Street & 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue South drainage improvements. Questions about future priority capital needs includes who pays to increase storm water pipe capacity on existing system – rate payer (directly or debt service) or developer (directly or SID), and a rate study to be completed in the fall of 2025.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions of Director Gaub.

Commissioner McKenney inquired about the sanitary sewer phases and was informed that one phase equals one year. There will be 75 to 100 phases to complete 221 miles of sanitary sewer main.

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Commissioner Tryon inquired how adoption of Resolution 10574 would affect the contracts with Malmstrom Air Force Base and Black Eagle.

Director Gaub responded that Malmstrom and Black Eagle are commercial accounts and those rates would be affected the same as any commercial entity. Both have a special rate that would also go up by 10% or 27%, depending on the Commission's actions tonight.

Commissioner Tryon inquired how the proposed rate increase would affect customers that qualify for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP).

Director Gaub responded that the rates would increase either by 10% (option A) or 27% (option B), but customers that qualify for LIEAP through Opportunities, Inc. would qualify for the 10% discount.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about utility charges for apartment buildings, duplexes, and four-plexes, and if the proposed rate increases would affect Section 8 renters.

Director Gaub clarified that the billing invoices are sent to the landowners, not to their tenants.

Utility Manager Laura Lynch added that a lot of apartment buildings only have one meter. The individuals who live in an apartment do not get billed and, therefore, would not qualify for the discount. The City bills the property owner/landlord and no longer bills the tenants.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of Resolution 10574.

**Jake Clark**, Great Falls Development Alliance (GFDA), commented that GFDA has long supported rate adjustments that ensure infrastructure systems are adequately funded. GFDA continues to advocate for such an increase because it is a necessary and responsible move for the future of the city.

This rate adjustment is about more than numbers on a bill — it is about setting the foundation for continued growth and development. Without adequate infrastructure capacity, development simply doesn't happen. Cities that cannot support growth are left behind, and right now, Great Falls has a critical opportunity to avoid that fate.

GFDA recognizes that a 27% increase is not easy and that it is a significant change. But, Great Falls rates, compared to other communities across Montana, are still middle-of-the-pack, even with this adjustment. This increase brings the City closer to reflecting the true cost of delivering high-quality city services to residents.

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This step is not just about today. It is about setting the stage for a stronger, more resilient city. It's about creating the conditions that attract high-wage jobs, grow our tax base, and support the kind of community we all want to live in — one with reliable infrastructure and real opportunity.

**Katie Hanning**, Home Builders Association of Great Falls, commented that during the Home and Garden Show, not one person stopped by and told her they do not want more. Everybody wants more - affordable housing, infill and they want more for downtown. Well, the system can't handle more. The City has to take care of its infrastructure. It doesn't pencil out for developers to do it on their own. They just can't. If we want more, it is going to cost more.

**Robert Alfred**, City resident, commented that the Commission should not keep kicking the can down the road. The Commission has to figure out a way to make it work because it just does not get any easier. From the moment something is created, it begins to deteriorate. That is what we are dealing with here.

**Chris Chamrau**, City resident, expressed concern about people on fixed incomes, such as Social Security. He inquired if there was a way to get revenue into this project besides higher bills.

**Molly Beck**, City resident, commented she is a proponent of Public Works in general. They are the people making the water come out clean and the toilets flush.

**Sherrie Arey**, NeighborWorks Great Falls, commented her support comes with caveats. She understands the need for infrastructure. But, over the course of time, she thinks there have been decisions made that have been very conservative, and have not thought about growth. As infrastructure is being looked at, she suggested looking at and incentivizing all the other mechanisms. One such item is CDBG funds and HOME funds. She suggested those funds need to go to homes and housing, not City projects. How the increase in funds is used and use of the other mechanisms that we have in our community is going to be essential to be able to make sure that individuals understand why it is important to have this increase.

The City Planning and Public Works Departments are well positioned to be able to bring forward those kind of opportunities. Hopefully, the City Commission will listen to those and also look for ways for affordable housing to help those individuals in our community.

Written comments in support of Resolution 10574 were submitted from:

**Zach Griffin**, CEO of Great Falls Association of Realtors, commented that rate adjustments, though challenging, are a necessary and responsible step to fund critical improvements, address aging infrastructure, and support growth. This resolution represents a long-term investment in the health, safety, and environmental stewardship of our community.

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**Katie Hanning**, Executive Officer of the Home Builders Association of Great Falls, urged the City Commission to adopt Resolution 10574.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to Resolution 10574.

**Steve Workman**, City resident and landlord, commented that it has been quite burdensome since the City changed its utility billing to the landlords/property owners rather than to the tenants. He suggested a non-governmental audit to find out if there are better ways to utilize the funds that the City already has. Because taxes and other utility bills have gone up, landlords cannot absorb all of these increases at once and it creates problems for them financially.

He also noted that if he passes the increases onto the tenants and raises their rent, he gets more turnover, and the longer it takes to rent units, it costs him more too.

He thinks Option A would be more easily absorbed by all landlords and homeowners. He suggested giving all landlords a discount for paying for their tenants water.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, commented that the average median household income in Great Falls is \$60,000, which is below the other cities mentioned. Every time fees and taxes increase it is a burden on the residents. She opined that the Commission should not have provided Covid funds to local non-profits and instead should have spent that money on City infrastructure. With regard to the Growth Policy survey, the people that took the survey felt that developers, not ordinary taxpayers, should fund City infrastructure for their projects.

**Kelly Arnold**, City resident, commented that he has never seen a 10% increase in one year in his life. Developers are going to charge what they are going to charge for a house. If they have to add \$10,000 on to the cost to run a sewer line, it is not going to stop them. Developers will get their money back one way or another. He also expressed concern that the Portage Meadows common area is not being watered and is full of weeds, and now his yard has dandelions and thistle because the City is not taking care of its responsibilities.

**John Hubbard**, City resident, showed the Commission a picture of a 100 year old tree that fell on his house on December 18, 2024 that he believes was caused by his neighbors not watering because people can't afford the water rates.

**Kristin Workman**, Black Eagle resident, commented that she is a landlord to nine properties in Great Falls. She is one of several landlords that accepts Section 8 vouchers. She cannot afford this increase since the City changed utility billing to the landlords/property owners rather than the tenants. The increase to Black Eagle will also affect Black Eagle residents who are mostly elderly and on Social Security. She concluded that there has got to be a better way to find money to increase infrastructure.

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**Barbara Erlandson**, City resident, commented that she is a member of the Montana Landlords Association. She is opposed to the utility rate increase because she will have to shoulder the additional fees. There are things she wants to do to give back to her tenants without having to raise the rent, but will not be able to because of the rate increase. She agreed with the previous speaker that the City needs to find a better way, or not increase the fees so much at one time.

There being no one further to address the Commission, Mayor Reeves asked Director Gaub if he wanted to respond to any comments.

Director Gaub clarified that the utility fund is funded only by utility rates, not taxes.

Written public comment in opposition to Resolution 10574 was received from:

**Jeanne Wilson**, City resident, expressed concerns about the proposed increases in water rates and lawns not being watered. She inquired about grants the City could apply for rather than raising rates.

**Marion H. and Shirley Rushing**, City residents, inquired what the problem is with the present water system that warrants this much of an increase, and how much money is presently in reserves. If the increases are not essential, they suggested a smaller increase in each area would help those in our community who could most benefit from a lesser burden.

**Stephanie Ross**, City resident, commenting that these increases pile onto the crushing economic burden already faced by working-class families in Great Falls who are reeling from soaring property taxes and rising costs for housing, groceries, healthcare, childcare and transportation, and cannot afford additional costs. She urged the Commission to reject the proposed 10% or 27% rate increase, and seek funding solutions that do not crush our community's working-class households.

**Chris Blancher**, City resident, commented that she cannot afford another increase in utilities, and is trying to figure out how to afford a needed public safety levy.

**Ginny Rogliano**, City resident, expressed total disagreement to the proposed fee increases, noting any fee increase appears to be irresponsible, unacceptable and very disappointing.

**Terry Bjork**, City resident, commented there was questionable and misleading information provided to the public via the mailed public notice, news stories, and objectionable information about the proposed use of the public's funds that should be the subject of a lot more public conversation and clarification prior to a decision of this magnitude. The many Great Falls voters living primarily on fixed incomes aren't receiving annual increases anywhere near enough to sustain the costs of utility and property tax increases.

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**Dennis Taylor**, commented his vote is “no” for the 27% rate increase in utilities.

**Amber Luse**, expressed concerns that the proposed 27% increase in utility rates poses a substantial risk to the passage of crucial safety levies. Her primary concern is the urgent need for improved public safety infrastructure in our community. Before new development, she suggested prioritizing the construction of a new fire station and the expansion of the police force. She urged the Commission to explore alternative funding solutions.

**Grant A. Van Vranken**, commented that the aging water infrastructure should have been addressed before any levy for parks, schools, library or public safety. He feels like the City has zero interest in doing its primary job – maintaining the infrastructure and keeping citizens safe.

Mayor Reeves closed the public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Mayor Reeves moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10574 to establish residential and commercial water, sewer, and storm drain utility service rates as set forth in Appendix A – Option B with an average 27% increase effective July 1, 2025.**

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

Commissioner Wilson commented that current rates do not cover the cost of the services being provided. It only makes sense that users pay rates that reflect the true cost of those services. Public Works is not in the business of making a profit—it provides essential services at a reasonable cost to the community.

Great Falls deserves to operate like a first-world city. We should prioritize maintaining and investing in our utility infrastructure to ensure reliable, quality services for all residents.

Commissioner Wolff emphasized that her decision is driven by the photos she receives each month from Public Works, showing the deteriorating condition of the City’s pipes. She noted that the City cannot continue to rely solely on lining sewer pipes and other temporary fixes, as doing so will lead to much higher costs in the future.

The current infrastructure is not being maintained as it should be, and postponing necessary investments will only worsen the problem over time. Addressing these issues now is critical to avoiding more expensive and disruptive repairs down the line.

Commissioner Tryon noted that the proposed 27% rate increase addresses both current infrastructure needs and future demands. He acknowledged that, while no one wants a higher water bill, the reality is that investments in infrastructure are essential for long-term growth and affordability.

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If we want more affordable rent or mortgages, we need to increase the supply of housing. One of the major barriers to that, he pointed out, is the City's aging and inadequate storm drain system. Without addressing these core infrastructure issues, new development remains difficult or unsustainable.

Commissioner Tryon emphasized the need for a shift in how the City approaches housing and development. What we've done so far hasn't worked. We need a different approach if we want to see the kind of progress and opportunities our community is asking for.

He concluded by stating that he would vote in favor of the increase—reluctantly—because it represents the City's best chance to build the infrastructure needed to support future growth and development.

Commissioner McKenney noted that he has been on the Commission three and one-half years. Quite frequently he hears the term that the can has been kicked down the road. He feels like he should have been issued a catcher's mitt because the cans just keep coming. He has been in business for myself most of his adult life. There is no choice but to keep up with inflation or to cut services or drop some of the services completely.

Commissioner McKenney inquired if Option B was to keep up with the current infrastructure or for new housing developments.

Director Gaub clarified that Option B helps existing infrastructure and makes sure that it is sized appropriately to not only help the existing infrastructure but also that it can receive and be hooked into by potential future growth in the City. The 10% increase would fund capital improvement projects of just maintaining sewer lining, for example, as opposed to upsizing sewer lines further.

Commissioner McKenney concluded that he did not get elected to kick the can.

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

Motion carried 5-0.

Mayor Reeves called a recess at 8:59 p.m., and called the meeting back to order at 9:05 p.m.

- 13. RESOLUTION 10566, REQUEST FROM THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT TO USE ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICT TAX INCREMENT FINANCE (TIF) FUNDS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$257,000 FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF DETERIORATED SIDEWALK AND NON-COMPLIANT ADA RAMPS WITH STREETSCAPE, ALONG THE EAST SIDE OF 7<sup>TH</sup> STREET SOUTH BETWEEN CENTRAL AVENUE AND 1<sup>ST</sup> AVENUE SOUTH.**

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

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that Resolution 10566 is a request from the Public Works Department to allocate additional Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds to complete pedestrian and streetscape improvements along the east side of 7th Street South, between Central Avenue and 1st Avenue South. The site plan can be found on page 67 of the Commission packet.

This project originally received \$243,000 in Downtown TIF funding back in September of 2023. The purpose of that investment was to improve deteriorated sidewalks, install ADA-compliant curb ramps, and enhance the overall streetscape in this highly visible downtown corridor. However, due to a combination of rising construction and labor costs, internal delays caused by staffing shortages and turnover in the Engineering Division, the project has not yet moved forward. As a result, the most recent construction estimate now stands at \$500,000, representing a 106% increase over the original budget. To avoid further delays, and to account for potential volatility between the current estimate and final bid pricing, Public Works is requesting an additional \$257,000 in Downtown TIF funds.

Director Cherry noted that the project remains fully consistent with the City's Downtown Urban Renewal Plan and satisfies all 12 of the TIF review criteria outlined in the application process. The original request was vetted and approved by staff, the Downtown Development Partnership, and this Commission. The Downtown Development Partnership also endorsed this additional funding request at its November 20, 2024 meeting.

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

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of Resolution 10566.

**Kellie Pierce**, representing the Business Improvement District and Downtown Development Partnership, commented that this has been an ongoing project, originally beginning with the streetscape initiative in 2014.

With the significant renovation of the O'Haire Motor Inn, she noted that it makes sense to support improvements to sidewalk and entrance accessibility in that area—particularly to bring them into ADA compliance. It's fitting to ensure this side of the street matches the look, feel, and accessibility of the other side.

Sandra Thares, owner of the O'Haire Motor Inn, Sip 'N Dip, and Clark & Lewie's, expressed her deep appreciation for the potential streetscape improvements. She would be incredibly grateful to finally have the beautiful streetscape she has been admiring across the street for the past 10 years.

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She shared that she has invested over \$4 million into renovating the property and emphasized the importance of maintaining a safe and attractive environment for visitors. Her businesses are a draw for people coming to Great Falls, and she is committed to doing everything she can to enhance the area's appearance and safety.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to Resolution 10566.

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 approve additional Downtown Urban Renewal District Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds in the amount of \$257,000 for the replacement of deteriorated sidewalk and non-compliant ADA ramps with streetscape, along the east side of 7th Street South between Central Avenue and 1st Avenue South.**

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

Commissioner McKenney thanked Ms. Thares for being an asset to the community.

Commissioner Tryon emphasized that the TIF funding is for public infrastructure - ADA sidewalks and ramps.

Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **14. RESOLUTIONS 10589 AND 10590, REQUESTS FOR USE OF DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) FUNDS.**

**I. RESOLUTION 10589, A REQUEST FROM THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS TO USE \$130,000 IN DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICT TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) FUNDS FOR THE COST OF THE REPLACEMENT OF DOWNTOWN TRASH RECEPTACLES.**

**II. RESOLUTION 10590, A REQUEST FROM THE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) TO USE \$35,000 IN DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICT TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) FUNDS FOR THE COST OF TRIMMING, MAINTAINING, AND REPLACING DOWNTOWN BOULEVARD TREES.**

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

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Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that this item consists of two related items under a joint public hearing—Resolutions 10589 and 10590. These requests were initiated by the Great Falls Business Improvement District, in collaboration with the Great Falls Development Alliance. Because the projects involve City-owned infrastructure and will be managed by the City, the City of Great Falls is the formal applicant. These requests propose the use of Downtown Urban Renewal District TIF funds to support essential streetscape improvements that directly benefit the public and advance the goals of the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan. Both items were unanimously supported by the Downtown Development Partnership at its March 19, 2025, meeting.

Resolution 10589 requests up to \$130,000 in TIF funding to replace 99 outdated trash receptacles throughout the downtown area. The existing receptacles were installed nearly 30 years ago, in 1995, and have become visibly worn, chipped, or damaged. Their flat-top design also attracts trash overflow and graffiti. The proposed new receptacles feature a domed rain cover, preventing misuse and allowing for a wrapped design that deters graffiti and reinforces the downtown branding. The selected design is visually consistent with other public realm upgrades, including the new wayfinding signage. A visual example of the proposed receptacles are on page 84 of the Commission packet.

Cost estimates are as follows: \$70,000 for the receptacles; \$10,000 for removal and disposal of existing receptacles, and \$50,000 for installation.

The City will manage acquisition and installation. Ongoing maintenance will remain the responsibility of the Business Improvement District.

Resolution 10590 requests \$35,000 in TIF funds to continue a successful program of maintaining and replacing downtown boulevard trees. This program was originally established through Resolution 10390 in 2021, which allocated \$125,000 over five years. This request extends that work into Fiscal Year 2026.

The funding would support tree pruning, removal of unhealthy trees, replacement where needed, and maintenance of sidewalk grates. The BID will coordinate closely with City staff to ensure all work complies with City Code. In addition, city staff are actively researching potential grant opportunities to fund a comprehensive downtown tree inventory to better assess long-term needs and species diversity.

Both of these projects meet Montana Code requirements and align with the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan. Replacing damaged trash receptacles and maintaining the boulevard trees now helps to avoid more expensive repairs later. It's preventive care for public infrastructure—and it saves money long-term. A clean, well-maintained environment also discourages vandalism, littering, and other negative behavior. When public spaces look cared for, people treat them with more respect. And while these projects don't generate tax revenue directly, they support business retention, visitor

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activity, and reinvestment downtown—all of which strengthen the City's tax base over time.

The Downtown TIF fund has sufficient capacity to fully support both requests without impacting current obligations or planned projects. If funding is not approved, there are no alternative sources identified, and these improvements would be delayed or canceled.

In short, Resolutions 10589 and 10590 are practical housekeeping investments that support a cleaner and safer downtown.

Mayor Reeves asked if the Commissioners had any questions for Director Cherry.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of Resolutions 10589 or 10590.

**Kellie Pierce**, representing the Business Improvement District (BID), commented that the discussion around downtown garbage receptacles has been ongoing for the better part of this year. She noted that many of the current cans suffer from deferred maintenance issues, including graffiti, structural damage—some are cracked down the sides—and the accumulation of items left on top of the receptacles.

The proposed replacement cans feature a rain canopy, which will help the BID better manage waste and reduce misuse. Additionally, the design allows for the application of a vinyl covering that can be used for branding downtown, displaying QR codes linking to local resources and events, and offering tasteful advertising opportunities. Pierce highlighted that the existing cans were installed in 1995 and are due for an update. The BID plans to replace all 99 cans in a phased approach.

Regarding tree maintenance, Pierce stated that the BID will be issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to hire a certified arborist to care for the mature trees downtown, which are also experiencing deferred maintenance. She also acknowledged that vandalism continues to be an issue for some of the trees. With rising costs in mind, the BID is requesting \$35,000 to cover the necessary maintenance work.

**Jake Clark**, Great Falls Development Alliance and member of the Downtown Development Partnership, commented that this is great use of TIF funds. This is also an example of great cooperation between City staff being proactive and helping the BID find solutions.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to Resolution 10589 or 10590.

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

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**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10589 to allow the use of up to \$130,000 in Downtown Urban Renewal District Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds for the replacement of the downtown trash receptacles in the Downtown Urban Renewal District.**

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

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10590 to allow the use of up to \$35,000 in Downtown Urban Renewal District Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds for the cost of trimming, maintaining, and replacing boulevard trees in the Downtown Urban Renewal District.**

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

Commissioner Wolff commended Ms. Pierce and the BID, et al., for keeping downtown beautiful.

Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **15. MEADOWVIEW VILLAGE MAJOR SUBDIVISION ANNEXATION AND PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT ZONING.**

**I. RESOLUTION 10578, ANNEXING THE PROPERTY LEGALLY DESCRIBED AS LOTS 8-10 AND 13-15 OF BEEBE TRACTS.**

**II. ORDINANCE 3273, ASSIGNING A PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) ZONING DISTRICT FOR THE SUBJECT PROPERTY.**

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

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that the Meadowview Village project has been in development since early 2025, well before any discussions regarding Resolution 10574, the proposed utility rate increases presented earlier this evening. This project is neither influenced by nor dependent on the outcome of that resolution. It has followed a standard, independent development process based on existing planning and subdivision review procedures.

Item 15 is a joint public hearing and includes three related actions:

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- Annexation of the Meadowview Village property and approval of the Improvement Agreement – Resolution 10578.
- Assignment of Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning – Ordinance 3273.
- Approval of the Preliminary Plat for the Meadowview Village Major Subdivision.

The applicant, Upslope Development, is proposing to create a 27-acre residential neighborhood located near Central Avenue and 46th Street South. Their goal is to expand access to attainable entry-level housing through compact, efficient site design.

The proposal includes:

- 163 single-family residential lots
- Lot sizes ranging from 1,200 to 5,800 square feet
- Cottage courts and shared green space
- A community center, indoor sport court, and playground
- Ten construction phases
- Privately maintained roads and open space managed by an HOA

The property is contiguous to City limits and located within existing police and fire service areas. Annexation allows for orderly growth and full access to City services and infrastructure. The Planned Unit Development zoning designation allows flexibility in lot size, setbacks, and open space requirements in exchange for well-designed shared amenities and enhanced community layout. All proposed deviations are fully documented and have been reviewed by staff.

The project received unanimous support from Neighborhood Council #4 during its March 27, 2025 meeting. The Planning Advisory Board and Zoning Commission also voted to recommend approval of all three actions at its April 22, 2025 meeting.

The developer will extend public water and sanitary sewer mains, which the City will own and maintain upon completion. Internal streets and alleys, however, will remain private and be maintained by the HOA.

Off-site improvements include:

- Curb and sidewalk installation along 46th Street
- An ADA-compliant crossing at Central Avenue
- A formal pedestrian path to Chief Joseph Elementary School
- Widened bike lanes for safe multimodal access

These improvements help ensure the neighborhood is accessible, safe, and connected.

Meadowview Village aligns with the City's 2013 Growth Policy by promoting attainable housing, infill development, and efficient use of infrastructure. From a fiscal perspective, it offers a more sustainable model for residential growth.

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Preliminary analysis by Public Works estimates Meadowview Village will generate about \$410,000 per year in infrastructure-related revenue under current (2023) rates over 100 years. This totals roughly \$40.8 million in nominal dollars, about \$1.5 million per gross acre. By comparison, a conventional low-density subdivision generates about \$0.5 million per gross acre. Meadowview's compact design triples that performance.

However, projected revenues still fall short of fully covering the 100-year lifecycle costs of public infrastructure. That said, the fiscal gap is substantially smaller than typical suburban expansion.

In short, Meadowview Village offers a more balanced, cost-conscious approach to development—one that advances housing goals while limiting future public liabilities.

This analysis indicates that Meadowview Village advances City objectives related to housing, infrastructure efficiency, and fiscal stewardship, while also reinforcing the need for continued evaluation of lifecycle costs in all future land use decisions.

Staff recommends that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10578 to approve annexation and the Improvement Agreement, adopt Ordinance 3273 to assign PUD zoning, and approve the Preliminary Plat of Meadowview Village.

This project expands housing opportunities, protects City resources, and supports compact, efficient growth.

**Applicant, Keith Miller**, representing Upslope Development, commented that his team is committed to building high-quality, entry-level homes that give buyers the opportunity to build equity and gain control over their long-term housing costs.

He started off with the elephant in the room: the dramatic increase in housing prices since 2019. At that time, the median home price in Montana was \$197,000. Today, it's around \$342,000. As a Montana resident, this is heartbreaking. That single figure underscores just how unaffordable housing has become for many in our state. We can all agree that this increase has made it extremely difficult for working families in Great Falls to achieve homeownership.

Their mission is to build attainable, for-sale homes—not rentals—that allow residents to invest in their futures. This project is particularly designed to support teachers, retired police officers, senior citizens, and other long-time Great Falls residents who deserve the opportunity to own a home.

Right now, nearly all large-scale residential construction in Great Falls is focused on rentals. With more people moving into the area—and major construction projects already on the horizon—demand is only increasing. Without a meaningful increase in supply, affordability will continue to decline.

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We can all agree on this: Great Falls needs more homes. According to the City's estimates, Great Falls requires 370 new for-sale homes per year. This project won't meet the full demand, but it will make a meaningful contribution.

Applicant Miller asked for Commission support—not just for this project, but for the future of housing in Great Falls.

He commended the Planning Department for the recent growth policy update, where housing affordability and availability were named the community's top priority. That aligns directly with what they are proposing here.

### **Project Details:**

- Location: About a mile west of the base, adjacent to St. Joseph Elementary School
- Infrastructure Improvements: Full upgrade of 46th Street, including curbs and gutters on both sides

### **Home Features:**

- A variety of home types and sizes
- All homes include front porches, LP Lap siding or better, Energy Star certification
- Permanent foundations and deeded lots—buyers will own both the home and the land
- 40 feet of green space in front of each home for community interaction

### **Community Amenities:**

- Clubhouse with fitness center and gathering space
- Playground
- Two indoor pickleball courts for year-round recreation
- Small and large dog parks
- HOA-managed shared spaces to ensure ongoing upkeep and quality

### **Visual Overview:**

Visual materials—site plans, rendered views, and a flythrough—to bring this vision to life. From paved alleys to walkable green corridors, this project is built to foster a sense of community and quality of life.

Also included was a petition with 77 verified signatures in support of the project, and a letter of support from the public school superintendent, noting proximity to St. Joseph Elementary, which has enrollment capacity.

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In conclusion, this project reflects what Great Falls' residents have asked for: more attainable, for-sale housing. It's thoughtful, community-oriented, and built with pride. He urged the Commission for their support to help address the housing shortage and shape a stronger, more equitable future for Great Falls.

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

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in support of Resolution 10578 or Ordinance 3273.

**CJ Reeves**, City resident, commented that he is one of the shepherds of the Great Falls Church of Christ, which currently owns the land where the Upslope group is proposing to build. He is joined tonight by his fellow shepherd, Bob Alfred, and minister, Dr. Matt Burleson.

When the Church was first approached about selling this land, they weren't actively looking to sell. However, after meeting with Keith and the Upslope team, and listening to their vision and goals, they were genuinely intrigued. Their focus on building affordable, high-quality homes to meet a growing need in our community resonated deeply with them.

As a church, they are keenly aware of the many needs in Great Falls. Through their ministries, they do what they can to serve others in small but meaningful ways. One issue they recognize is the significant housing challenge in this city. The reality is that Great Falls has a large inventory of homes that are more than 40 years old, and many people simply cannot afford a custom-built home on a large lot with a traditional foundation.

The Upslope group's approach—keeping home prices attainable, incorporating modern building technologies and energy-efficient standards, and designing neighborhoods that encourage community—struck them as thoughtful and timely. They were especially encouraged by their inclusion of green spaces and community amenities, which promote not just housing, but livable, connected neighborhoods.

They also appreciated hearing real-world examples of similar housing models working successfully in other parts of Montana. That gave them added confidence that this isn't just a concept—it's a solution that can work here, too.

With major developments coming to Great Falls—especially the anticipated growth tied to the Sentinel ICBM program at Malmstrom Air Force Base—and other east-end economic activity, the city's housing deficit will only continue to grow unless proactive steps are taken.

They believe this project is one of those steps. It addresses a pressing need and offers a real chance for families to break into homeownership in a very difficult market. It is in

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that spirit, and with the well-being of the broader community in mind, that they respectfully ask the Commission for support the approval of this subdivision.

**Ron Paulick**, City resident, inquired who would take care of the sidewalks in the wintertime to access Chief Joseph School if there is supposed to be a homeowners association that will take care of the properties.

**Ed Brown**, Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, commented that the one thing he consistently hears the most from businesses about is the lack of housing. If you drive anywhere else in the state, you see the projects that are happening that are not happening in Great Falls. So, the fact that this is a possibility and it's not asking a lot of our community right now should be a no brainer. The Sentinel project will also make an impact.

**Jake Clark**, Great Falls Development Alliance, spoke in strong support of the proposed housing project. He noted that over the past several years, there have been many conversations with the Commission about the growing housing challenges in the community—and this project represents exactly the kind of solution those early conversations had hoped for.

We're talking about the highest and best use of an underutilized property. This is infill development that will increase the tax base on a currently underperforming piece of land.

Clark emphasized the importance of the opportunity this project presents: homeownership for 163 individuals and families in Great Falls. That kind of opportunity hasn't come before this Commission in a very long time.

He pointed out that housing costs are the single largest contributor to Great Falls' rising cost of living, especially compared to national averages. Homes cost more, and the cost to borrow is higher. A project like this helps counter those pressures.

Clark concluded by expressing his pride in being part of a process that brings real solutions to a critical community need.

**Katie Hanning**, Home Builders Association, commented that this is a perfect project. It is what Great Falls needs. It is different.

**Sherrie Arey**, NeighborWorks Great Falls, emphasized how unique and important this project is, particularly in addressing workforce housing and the "missing middle" that often falls between affordable housing programs and market-rate options.

NeighborWorks has been engaged with the Upslope Group since the very beginning of the project. She expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity to provide homebuyer education and potentially offer loan products to help families take advantage of this new housing option.

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NeighborWorks is excited to partner on this project and see how it can serve as a model—something that might be replicated or adapted to serve even more people in the community.

She closed by voicing full support for the project and expressed hope that it would lead to additional, similarly impactful developments in the future.

**Mike Banks**, Home Loan Division Manager for Opportunity Bank in Great Falls and Helena, spoke as an experienced lender and advocate for first-time homebuyers. With 25 years of lending experience in Great Falls, he emphasized the importance of homeownership and the specific opportunities this project provides.

Banks highlighted his long-standing partnership with NeighborWorks and the use of various grants and programs through Montana Housing to support homebuyers. He pointed out a second loan product, which offers down payment and closing cost assistance—available for rural development, FHA, VA, and conventional buyers.

A key benefit of this project is the MH Advantage designation that the homes will carry. This designation, recognized by Fannie Mae, expands lending guidelines and makes it easier for buyers to qualify. It also ensures these homes will hold their value, as appraisals can use comparable single-family residences, which is a significant advantage for both initial buyers and future resale.

Banks acknowledged the current difficult interest rate environment but emphasized that these homes qualify for lower rates through Montana Housing and other special programs, making homeownership more accessible. He sees this project as crucial in allowing young professionals, college graduates, and working families to buy homes in Great Falls, supporting long-term community stability.

**Robert Alfred**, City resident, shared an example about housing affordability in Great Falls. He explained that, based on his calculations, the average monthly mortgage payment on a typical home purchased two or three years ago is about \$1,000 higher than if the buyer had purchased four or five years ago. This increase over such a short period is significant.

Alfred expressed excitement about the proposed housing project but wished there were 1,630 homes available to meet demand. He concluded by noting how surprising it is what young families are currently paying for apartments in Great Falls, underscoring the urgency for more affordable homeownership options.

Written public comments were submitted from:

**Sheila Rice**, City resident, commented in support of the Meadowview Village development, noting Great Falls desperately needs new homeownership opportunities for our residents.

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**Terry Bjork**, City resident, supports the project but expressed concerns about recent reporting that the developer is seeking a Special Improvement District to fund infrastructure improvements.

**Col. Benji Johnson, Deputy Commander, USAF**, urged the Commission to prioritize the development of quality housing within Great Falls, specifically more affordable housing units. By investing in more affordable housing options, the community can support not only our young Airmen population, but also Great Falls citizens who struggle to find affordable housing.

**Zac Griffin, CEO of the Great Falls Association of Realtors**, commented that the proposed annexation of Meadowview Village aligns with the City's goals for planned growth and housing development. By incorporating this area into the city limits, Great Falls will gain much-needed housing inventory, support economic development, and ensure consistent service delivery standards.

**Katie Hanning, Executive Officer of the Home Builders Association of Great Falls**, commented in support of approving the annexation of Meadowview Village into the City of Great Falls.

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public in opposition to Resolution 10578 or Ordinance 3273.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if the applicant wanted to respond to the question about snow removal and the HOA.

Mr. Miller responded that a plan has not been finalized yet for the winter plowing between their project and the elementary school.

Mayor Reeves closed the joint public hearing and asked the will of the Commission.

**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission adopt Resolution 10578 to annex the property legally described as Lots 8-10 and 13-15 of Beebe Tracts and approve the Improvement Agreement, subject to the Conditions of Approval being fulfilled by the applicant.**

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

Commissioner McKenney commented that, over the past couple of years, the City Commission has approved several housing developments, but many of those projects have not progressed, often due to financing challenges. Without needing to go into their business details, he inquired if Mr. Miller could confirm—if this project is approved—if they are fully prepared and ready to begin construction and move forward.

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Mr. Miller responded that they are absolutely ready to get started. They won't be able to start digging right away because they still have some prep work to do. But, they are committed to seeing this through.

Commissioner McKenney commented that he hasn't heard any specifics yet about the price points for these homes. He inquired if Mr. Miller was comfortable disclosing the expected low-end and high-end price ranges.

Mr. Miller responded that, on a day-to-day basis, those numbers change. Unfortunately, he can't get into it quite yet.

Commissioner Tryon inquired the projected timeframe for project completion.

Mr. Miller responded five to seven years for all of the phases and completion of 163 homes.

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

Motion carried 5-0.

**Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission adopt Ordinance 3273 to assign Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning to the subject property, subject to the Conditions of Approval being fulfilled by the applicant.**

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

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission approve the Preliminary Plat of Meadowview Village Major Subdivision subject to the Conditions of Approval being fulfilled by the applicant.**

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

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **16. PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AGREEMENT AMENDMENT NO. 1 FOR THE WATER TREATMENT PLANT (WTP) HEAD HOUSE AND RAPID MIX VAULT PROJECT. OF 1332.7**

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Public Works Director Chris Gaub reported that Agenda Item 16 is to amend the Professional Services Agreement for the project to repair the Head House of the 100-year-old Water Treatment Plant, which delivers one of the most essential services — clean drinking water.

During a routine inspection, areas of concern were discovered in the Head House that required a structural inspection. The Head House is where the treatment process begins — it's the first-place raw water from the Missouri River enters the system.

To get ahead of the problem, staff brought in TD&H Engineering to do a full condition assessment and prepare a plan to restore the Head House safely and effectively. The structural evaluation identified deficiencies that will require repair or replacement, and it recommended completing the work within the next five years.

As a reminder, the Commission approved a Professional Services Agreement with TD&H last summer. This PSA included designing the repairs, assembling construction documents, and preparing the project to go out to bid later this summer.

Tonight's request is an amendment to expand their professional services scope. It allows TD&H to help the city apply for a SRF Loan, perform additional engineering services, and provide full-time construction inspection. Later this Fall, we will ask the Commission to approve a construction contract for the repairs.

**Commissioner Wolff moved, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, that the City Commission approve the Professional Services Agreement Amendment No. 1 in the amount of \$256,000 to TD&H Engineering Inc., for the Water Treatment Plant Head House and Rapid Mix Vault project and authorize the City Manager to execute the agreement documents.**

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 Tryon commented that he is happy to see progress on this on-going important project. He expressed appreciation to Public Works for all the work they do.

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

Motion carried 5-0.

### **17. SOUTH GREAT FALLS STORM DRAIN MIDDLE BASIN PROJECT, CHANGE ORDER NO. 1. OF 1820.0**

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Public Works Director Chris Gaub reported that Agenda Item 17 is a change order for the project that is installing storm drain infrastructure just south of the Fire Training Facility and Highland South Park. The Commission first approved this construction project on December 3, 2024.

This project is part of a long-term storm drainage plan that began over a decade ago to address chronic flooding issues. Eight major upgrades have been completed so far. This particular project — one of five still in progress — will install new 36- to 48-inch concrete pipes and inlets to help move stormwater efficiently and safely underground, which will reduce the need for it to flow over the land.

Tonight's item — Change Order No. 1 — is about keeping that progress on track. It does two important things: it compensates the contractor for standby costs that they incurred when work was delayed, and it also authorizes the construction of an access road across Great Falls Public School property so equipment can reach the site and work can continue. Great Falls Public Schools has been extremely supportive of this issue.

The work delay was caused by a legal dispute over a recorded easement, which gives the City a legal right to access private land for public infrastructure. Despite the legal clarity of that easement, the property owner took steps to block access, including physically parking vehicles across the path and stopping the contractor from working. Rather than let this continue to delay progress — and cost the public more time and money — staff is recommending a temporary workaround while they also seek to recover these costs through appropriate legal channels. Staff is closely coordinating this effort with the City Attorney.

Staff is doing what is necessary to protect both work progress and public dollars. Approving this change order will allow critical storm drainage work to continue, which will help ensure our community is better prepared for rainwater and snow melt events.

**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission approve Change Order No. 1 in the amount of \$149,721 and increase the total contract amount from \$1,581,695.80 to \$1,731,416.80.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public.

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Mayor Reeves commented that one person's obstruction costing the City an additional \$150,000 is irritating. He inquired if the City has filed an injunction or other pleading in District Court to be able to do what the City legally has a right to do.

City Attorney David Dennis commented that he has filed an action asking the court to interpret the easement agreement. The reason he has not requested a temporary injunction

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or injunctive relief is because in order to get injunctive relief, the City has to show irreparable injury. Irreparable injury is something that you can't put a dollar amount on. The City doesn't have the ability to show an injury that is not compensable by a dollar amount.

Mayor Reeves inquired if the District Court sides with the City, could the City then file a \$150,000 lien on the person's property?

City Attorney Dennis responded only if the Court awards the City damages in that amount. There are no guarantee that the Court would do that.

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

Motion carried 5-0.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

### **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS**

#### **18. ORDINANCE 3275, A REQUEST FROM BENEFIS HEALTH SYSTEMS ASSIGNING PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) ZONING TO THE PROPERTY LEGALLY DESCRIBED AS LOT 1A1A OF BLOCK 1, MOUNT OLIVET ADDITION FOR THE SANAVITA ESTATES DEVELOPMENT.**

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that first reading of Ordinance 3275 proposes assigning Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning to the Sanavita Estates project.

This 42-acre site, owned by Benefis Health System, is intended to replace the previously approved Grandview PUD with a more compact, age-restricted residential community. The proposed development includes 64-unit senior apartment buildings and 28 single-family villas, along with private amenities and open space. It also includes infrastructure improvements such as the extension of 18th Avenue South and improved street connectivity to support long-range transportation goals.

**Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Commissioner Wolff, that the City Commission accept Ordinance 3275 on first reading and set a public hearing for July 1, 2025.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public.

**Ron Paulick**, City resident, commented he was supportive of the project, but expressed concerns about Benefis being a non-profit and not paying taxes. He suggested Benefis pay fees in lieu of taxes to help the City with fire safety or possibly a fund to help support

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the community. The community is not just everybody who pays taxes, it is also those that do not pay the taxes.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, raised concerns about the zoning and tax implications of the proposed development tied to Benefis and its request for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) with an underlying Public Lands and Institutions (PLI) zoning designation.

As it stands, residential uses are not permitted in PLI districts, not even through a conditional use permit. Yet this proposal seeks approval of a PUD with an underlying PLI designation specifically for residential development. That raises two important questions:

How does the City justify going against its own zoning district code?

Why would Benefis—and the City—pursue this path knowing that PLI is not intended for residential use?

It appears that this is part of a broader strategy tied to a minor subdivision that would split the parcel into four lots. One of those lots—currently housing the Grandview Senior Assisted Living and Long-Term Care Facility—is healthcare-related and appropriately designated as PLI. That use makes sense under existing zoning rules.

However, Benefis is seeking to apply the same PLI designation to Lots 2 and 3, even though the intended use is residential, which is explicitly not allowed under that zoning classification.

To her, it seems like an effort to maintain or obtain tax-exempt status on property that would otherwise be taxable if zoned and used as residential. That would shift even more of the tax burden onto property owners like herself—especially considering that Benefis-owned property in Great Falls is valued at nearly \$328 million (2024 values), much of which already enjoys tax-exempt status.

This is not a small issue. Every tax-exempt acre increases the cost for everyone else—especially when those properties still rely on city infrastructure and services funded by the general fund.

She urged the Commission to take a hard look at what is being proposed here and ask:

- Why is a residential project being advanced under a zoning category that prohibits residential use?
- And what are the broader fiscal impacts of allowing more tax-exempt residential development under the guise of a PLI designation?

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

## **JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDING**

**June 3, 2025**

Hearing none, Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 5-0.

### **CITY COMMISSION**

#### **19. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Commissioner Wolff expressed appreciation to Captain Mahlum and many of his officers that attended the Safety Alliance meeting today to address the downtown transient issues, etc.

#### **20. COMMISSION INITIATIVES.**

It was the consensus of the Commission to direct Manager Doyon to explore options the City may have with regard to the Rocky Mountain Building that burned several years ago, and to include the Downtown Business Partnership in his research efforts.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, **Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Mayor Reeves, to adjourn the regular meeting of June 3, 2025, at 10:11 p.m.**

Motion carried 5-0.

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Mayor Cory Reeves

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City Clerk Lisa Kunz

**Minutes Approved: June 17, 2025**