

GENERAL COMMENTS

I wanted to make the last commission meeting but could not attend. I note that once again, the Park District levy passed for the same amount as when first implemented. If you go back to the work sessions and the propaganda the city put out when added to the ballot, you see that the city claimed this levy was for a backlog of park maintenance and accessibility issues. How much of that has been completed and how much has been used for the Aim High facility and other things instead?

Here's some of the city propaganda from the Park levy

1. \$1.5 million for the first three years. City inferred that it could levy for less in future years but that did not happen. The city indicated the backlog maintenance catchup was a five year plan. It's now 8 years in and we are still being assessed an amount to raise \$1.5 million a years for park maintenance.
2. "It is not the intent to expand the existing park system, but to maintain it."
3. Park District Survey: only 15% indicated that the city should develop a new aquatic center.

So only 15% public approval but the city did it anyway. That's the modus operandi of the city — not to listen to city residents and taxpayers. The city led us to believe the facility would be self-sustaining and that didn't happen. Some of us tried to tell the city that they should have a plan in place for running this facility BEFORE it was built, but those comments fell on deaf ears. I've attached some proof of those concerns.

Why is there deferred maintenance? The city manager has been in place since since 2008. So why wasn't anything done to address the park maintenance backlog until nine years later. Also, how many years did the city golf course go on to hemorrhage money before something was finally done about it?

Seems to raise a question of competence.

AGENDA ITEM 13

Another feasibility study! For the most part the city doesn't consider the results of contracted surveys, master plans and feasibility studies unless they agree with the prevailing views and opinions of the city manager and city staff. That's been proven with the Public Safety levy, Park District levy and the Library levy.

This will be another example of the city wasting our tax money on a feasibility study. If the city manager and city staff need a feasibility studies to make decisions, then what services do they provide to the city? They are certainly not hired or their expertise if taxpayers have to pay outside firms for master plans and feasibility studies to determine what's best for Great Falls. \$96,000 for a feasibility study is one and a half times the median household income of a Great Falls family. That's just ridiculous. We pay the city manager \$205,000 plus benefits and departments heads also are paid handsomely. These studies and plans should be part of their job duties.

principle architect Tim Peterson during his presentation. The team will have five years to complete construction, but Peterson said it would likely take less time.

During the public hearing conducted prior to the vote, only one person spoke in opposition to the conditional use permit. Jeni Dodd emphasized that she is in favor of the facility, however she expressed concerns regarding the lack of transparency for the total budget cost for the project, adding building costs as prices for construction materials are currently rising.

"I'm wondering if the city would consider a private company to operate this facility because I don't want to see this become another golf course, with a million dollar plus deficit in our general fund," Dodd said. "I don't know whether or not the facility will be self sustaining."

She said there was an appearance of bias in assigning city construction contracts to a handful of firms in town and wondered if the added parts to the facility like a gym and basketball court would put the public facility in competition with private businesses like Peak Fitness.

Both Director of Planning and Community Development Craig Raymond and Peterson opted not to respond to comments made during the public hearing.

CUP Meeting for the Indoor Sports and Recreation Center
Public Comment
March 23, 2021

Where will the \$10 million the City of Great Falls has to provide, as a match to the \$10 million DCIP grant, come from?

The City of Great Falls Park and Recreation Master Plan from 2016 has been brought up as a guide for this project, but upon further investigation, questions arise: The 176 page report identified the current/future park and rec needs for the City. Included in that was a recommendation for the Capital Improvement Program that called for \$12,614,160 in **Critical Improvements** to the City Park system (see exhibit #1 - Critical Improvements).

This led to the Great Falls Park District 1 Tax Assessment, passed in 2018 (exhibit #2 - Park District Info). These funds were earmarked to be spent **ONLY** on City park maintenance and accessibility issues. The **Most Supported Actions**, from the Master Plan, showed the desire to repair aging neighborhood parks as the overwhelming need by Great Falls citizens (see exhibit #3 - Support).

The City of Great Falls has decided to take these funds, earmarked to "repair and improve" City Parks and spend the vast majority as matching funds on the Aim High Big Sky Rec Center. It does not matter if they are directly using the funds or bonding against the funds from the Assessment, they are still unusable for the required City Park maintenance. Simply put, the Great Falls City Parks have just taken a back seat to a project that was not even approved by the voting public. So, the logical question is: when do City parks finally get "Critical Improvements" and how is that paid? Another tax assessment? Any way you look at it, Great Falls residents are being taxed for a new Rec Center that they did not know about, provide input on, or approve.

Doug Mahlum
Ownership group for the Peak Health and Wellness



Exhibit #1 - Critical Improvements

15.8 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

In order to plan and prioritize capital investments, the consulting team recommends that the Park and Recreation Department applies specific guiding principles that balances the maintenance of current assets over the development of new facilities. The departmental CIP framework is also utilized to determine and plan CIP projects and make budget decisions that are sustainable over time. These criteria (e.g., safety compliance, commitment, efficiency, revenue) and priorities are also focused on maintaining the integrity of the current infrastructure and facilities before expanding and/or enhancing programs and facilities.

The synthesis of data from this planning process indicates strong support for this concept of prioritization. Even with the indications of a modest economic turnaround, funding is not sufficient to take care of all existing assets and build new facilities.

The result is the recommendation to develop a three-tier plan that acknowledges a stark fiscal reality, leading to the continuous rebalancing of priorities and their associated expenditures. Each tier reflects different assumptions about available resources.

- The **Critical Alternative** has plans for prioritized spending within existing budget targets. The intention of this alternative is to refocus and make the most of existing resources with the primary goal being for the department to maintain services. The actions associated with the Fiscally Constrained Alternative address deferred maintenance at existing facilities and is funded through existing tax dollars.
- The **Sustainable Alternative** describes the extra services or capital improvement that should be undertaken when additional funding is available. This includes strategically enhancing existing programs, beginning new alternative programs, adding new positions, or making other strategic changes that would require additional operational or capital funding. In coordination with the City Manager's Office and City Commission, the Park and Recreation Department would evaluate and analyze potential sources of additional revenue, including but not limited to capital bond funding, partnerships, program income, grants, and existing or new taxes.
- The **Visionary Alternative** represents the complete set of services and facilities desired by the community. It is fiscally unconstrained but can help provide policy guidance by illustrating the ultimate goals of the community, and by providing a long-range look to address future needs and deficiencies. In this Master, the Vision Alternative addresses aging facilities to make improvements in operational effectiveness and the overall sustainability of the park and recreation system. Funding for vision projects would be derived from partnerships, private investments and new tax dollars.



Exhibit #1 - Critical Improvements

8 | CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS - MAINTAINING WHAT WE HAVE

This section outlines the projects and estimated capital costs of each that focus on the lifecycle replacement of existing facilities and amenities.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM	
CRITICAL	
PARK/FACILITY	COST
American's Little League	\$102,575
Belview Park	\$5,750
Bloomington Park	\$3,950
Boston Heights Park	\$114,010
Carter Park	\$33,540
Centene Stadium	\$2,500
Charles Russell Park	\$1,020,000
Chowen Springs Park	\$6,500
Clara Park	\$388,520
Community Hall Park-Westside Orchard Garden	\$4,600
Don Olson 90ft Baseball Field	\$6,000
Dudley Anderson Park	\$8,350
Eagles Crossing Park	\$85,020
Elks Riverside Park	\$8,000
Fox Hollow Park	\$4,000
Garden Home Park	\$8,000
Gibson Park	\$2,935,000
Grande Vista Park	\$102,575
Graybill Park	\$89,900
Highland Multi-Sport Complex	\$1,235,000
Highland Portion - Electric City BMX Park	\$3,000
Hylands Heights Park	\$85,875
Jaycee Gallatin Park	\$625,000
Jaycee Pool	\$100,000
Kiwanis North Park	\$95,270
Kiwanis West Park	\$90,000
Kranz Park	\$205,510
Lions Park	\$300,000
Madison Park	\$7,420
Mitchell Pool - Electric City Water Park	\$500,000
Meadowlark Park	\$1,000
Memorial Park	\$110,510
Natorium	\$800,000
Noah's Ark Park	\$48,170
Oddfellows Park	\$205,000
Overlook Park	\$114,900
Pinski Park	\$457,480
Rhodes Park	\$118,110
River's Edge Trail	\$100,000
Riverview Little League Park	\$14,900
Riverview Park	\$194,790
Roosevelt Park	\$110,510
Sacajawes Park	\$183,300
Skyline Heights Park	\$275,670
Skyline Park	\$289,130
Sunnyside Park	\$5,010
Valleyview Park	\$390,440
Verde Park	\$387,875
Wadsworth Park Site Specific Master Plan	\$100,000
Warden Park	\$18,000
Water Tower Pool	\$50,000
West Bank Park	\$445,000
TOTAL	\$12,614,160

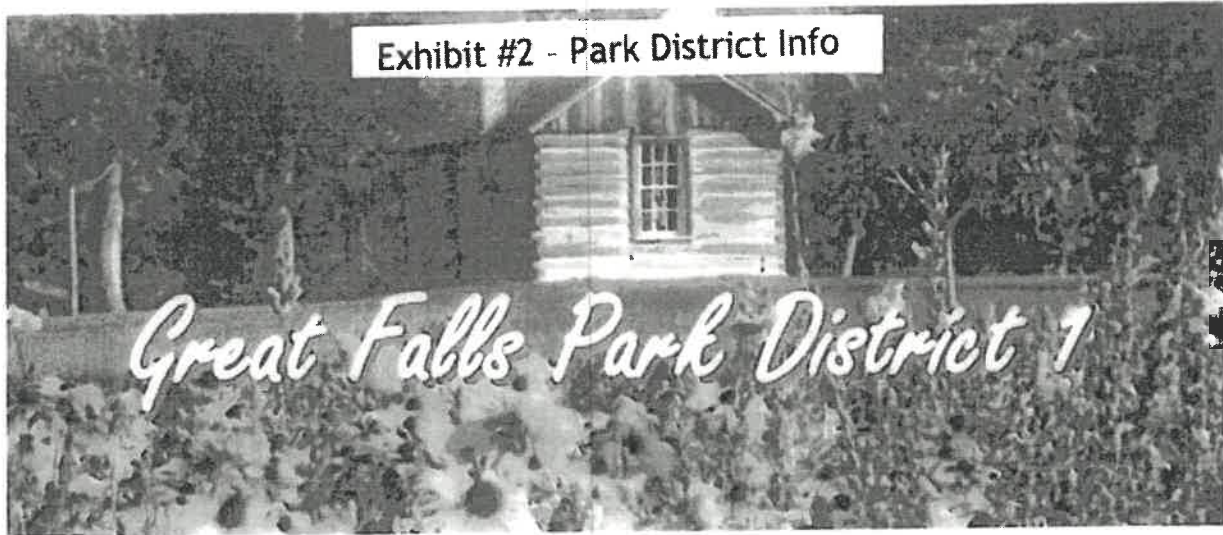
Exhibit #1 - Critical Improvements

8.2 SUSTAINABLE RECOMMENDATIONS - IMPROVING WHAT WE HAVE

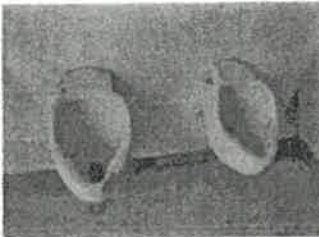
Options described in this section provide the extra services or capital improvement that could be undertaken when additional funding is available to meet need(s) with a focus on enhancements to existing facilities. The following provides a summary of the sustainable options recommended by the consulting team.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM	
SUSTAINABLE	
PROJECT	COST
Convert 6 existing Tennis Courts to Pickleball Courts	\$100,000
Add 5 Large Covered Picnic Shelters at the following parks:	\$500,000
*Gibson Park	
*Grande Vista Park	
*Jaycee Park	
*Kiwanis Park	
*Meadowlark Park	
Add 2 Dog Parks at the following parks	\$150,000
*Clara Park	
*Montana Park	
Develop Site Specific Master Plans for the following parks	\$350,000
*Garden Home Park	
*Skyline Park	
*Wadsworth Park	
Conduct an Athletic Field Master Plan	\$50,000
TOTAL	\$1,150,000

Exhibit #2 - Park District Info

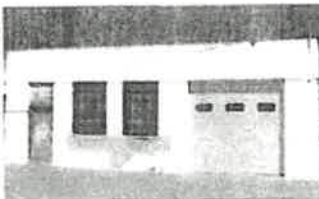


On May 8, voters will be asked to consider creating a Park District to address \$12.6 million in deferred maintenance identified in the Park and Recreation Master Plan: <https://greatfallsmt.net/recreation>. If the creation of the Park District is approved by the voters, the proposed assessment amount for the District would be \$1.5 million annually for the first three years. The assessment method would be based on taxable property value. The estimated 2018 assessment for a property with a 2017 market value of \$100,000 would be \$1.91 per month.



Maintenance Problems and Consequences

- \$12.6 million in critical projects should be addressed in the next five years. Delaying maintenance increases costs of repairs and the critical projects list will continue to grow.
- Park trails, sports courts and other park facilities that deteriorate and become unsafe may be closed.
- Trees that aren't maintained create safety hazards, damage property, will become unhealthy and over time will die. Trees should be trimmed every 4-7 years and are currently being trimmed on a 30-35 year schedule.
- City parks are watered by aging and inefficient irrigation systems including manual systems that require significant staff hours and higher water usage.



Accessibility and Safety Issues

- 7 of 8 park bathrooms have ADA accessibility issues and need repairs and maintenance.
- Only 3 of 30 parks with play structures have ADA accessible sidewalks.
- 7 of 18 parks with walking trails have paths that are in poor condition including Gibson Park and Elks Riverside trails.
- 15 of 17 sports courts need repairs.
- The bath house at the Electric City Water Park needs major repairs and ADA accessibility improvements.



Exhibit #2 - Park District Info

What is a Park District?

A Park District is a special purpose district which would allow the City to assess funds to be used for parks, forestry and trails for capital improvements, staff and operations. Funds may also be used for maintenance and improvements to recreation and aquatics facilities; but may not be used for programming.

What will the money be spent on?

Projects planned for the first three years include, but are not limited to:

- ADA restroom improvements for various parks
- ADA sidewalks to play structures
- Electric City Water Park bath house improvements
- Replacement of Elk's Riverside Park Trail
- Overlay of Gibson Park Trail
- Resurface sports courts (basketball, tennis/pickleball)
- Multi Sports dugouts/backstops
- Picnic pavilion
- Trail improvements
- Irrigation upgrades
- Tree trimming and replacement

What happens if the Park District doesn't pass?

The Park and Recreation Master Plan identified \$12.6 million in deferred or critical maintenance projects to be completed within the next five years. Deferred maintenance will continue with eventual closures of facilities and play equipment that are deemed unsafe. There will be a significant reduction of services including mowing, watering and tree maintenance with the community parks receiving more services than neighborhood parks.

Why doesn't the City sell park land?

The one time funds from the sale of park land would do little to help offset the \$12.6 million in deferred maintenance. In addition, most of the land is not conducive for any purpose other than open space which would make it difficult to sell. Some pieces are dedicated as park land and cannot be sold. Sale of park land requires a 4/5 vote of the City Commission.

For up to date information on the Park District call 771-1265,
Monday - Friday, 8am - 5pm
or visit <https://greatfallsmt.net>

VOTE MAY 8, 2018

PARK FACTS

82%
of people use
GF parks

57
city parks

69%
of people used
GF trails last year

53
miles of
River's Edge Trail

79%
of people oppose
selling park land

36,000
trees in
boulevards and
parks

Exhibit #2 - Park District Info

Great Falls Park District 1

FAQ

1.) What is a park district?

- a. A park district is a form of local special-purpose district for providing and/or maintaining public parks and recreation in or near its geographic boundaries.

2.) How much will it cost the average homeowner?

- a. The assessment is based on taxable value which is set by the Montana Department of Revenue. The estimated cost for homeowners is \$22.92 a year for a property with a market value of \$100,000. Residents can call the City Finance Office at 455-8477 or the Park and Recreation Office at 771-1265 for an estimate.

3.) Do any other cities in Montana have park districts? If so, which ones?

- a. Missoula, Billings, Colstrip

4.) Why does Park & Recreation need more money?

- a. The purpose of the Park District is to address the \$12.6 million dollars in deferred maintenance and some operational needs identified in the Park Master Plan. **It is not the intent to expand the existing park system, but to maintain it.**

- b. The Park and Recreation Master Plan is available online at:

<https://greatfallsmt.net/recreation>.

5.) Why haven't any of the undeveloped parks been developed or sold.

- a. Sale of all undeveloped park land would only generate approximately \$370,478; most of the property is not conducive for any purpose except open space, which would make it difficult to sell. Some pieces of park property were provided to the City as dedicated park land and therefore, could not be sold.
- b. Sale of the property would relieve the city of maintenance and insuring the property, but would do little to help offset the \$12.6 million in deferred maintenance.

6.) Are there any circumstances under which Park and Recreation is willing to sell existing developed or undeveloped parks?

Exhibit #2 - Park District Info

- a. Sale of park land requires a public process with community input (Montana Code 3.04.030).
- b. The final determination would be made by the City Commission and requires a 4/5 vote (Montana Code 3.04.010).
- c. In addition, there is a concern with selling park land because it would be a loss of green space that can't be replaced.

7.) There have been lots of ads on the radio about Park and Recreation lately. How much is the city paying for those ads?

- a. The radio spots that have been running on all Central Montana radio stations have been running for almost two years. There has been no cost to the City for the radio spots. According to Central Montana Radio's General Manager, they are happy to provide support to the community and Park and Recreation, and to supply this pro bono service. (In addition, prior to running these radio spots, they have run weekly psa's for Park and Recreation.)

8.) What are the alternatives if the park district is not approved.

If the District is not created, potential options to address the issues identified in the Master Plan include, but may not be limited to:

- Significant increase in general fund support.
- Continued deferral of maintenance; closure of facilities or equipment that are unsafe.
- Potential sale of City park land.
- Significant reduction of services – tiered maintenance of parks. Heavily used parks will be maintained more regularly than less used parks. Maintenance includes watering, mowing, equipment repair, and tree maintenance.
- Development of new parks would only be possible with local park assessments in subdivision covenants to include park construction and ongoing maintenance.

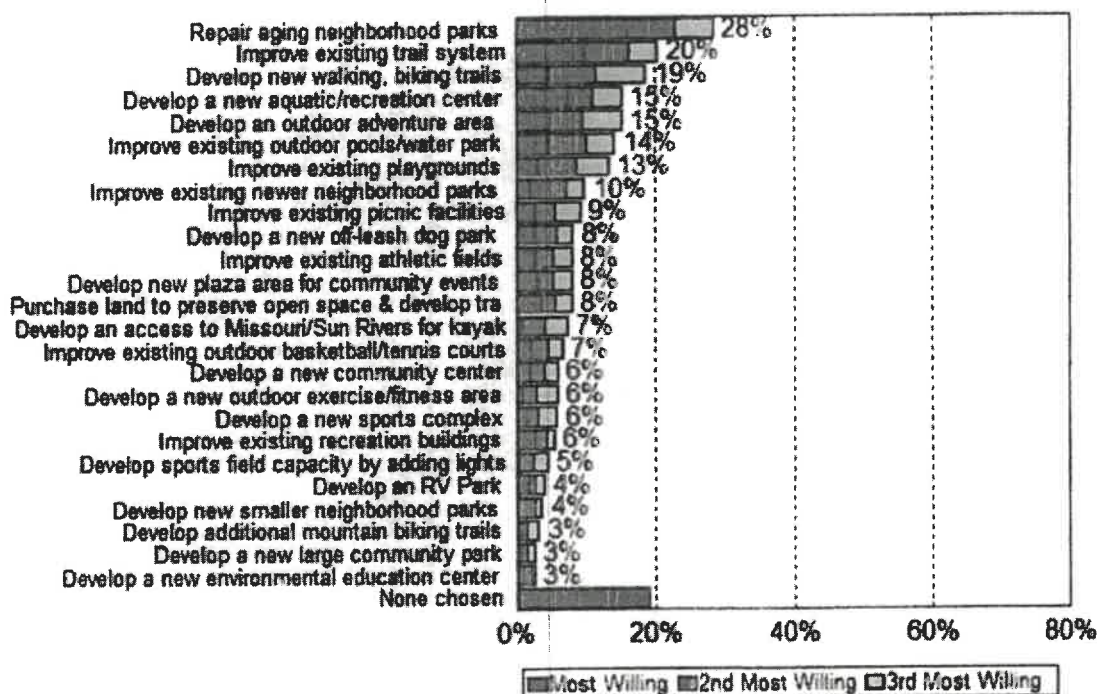
Date Created: March 2018

Exhibit #3 - Support

- Most Supported Actions: Twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents indicated they were the most willing to fund the repair of aging neighborhood parks. Other items respondents are the most willing to fund include: improve existing trail system (29%), develop new walking and biking trails (19%), **develop a new aquatic/recreation center (15%)**, develop an outdoor adventure area (15%), improve existing outdoor pools/water park (14%), and improve existing playgrounds (13%).

Q13. Actions That Respondents are Most Willing to Fund

by percentage of respondents



Source: ETC Institute (2016)

Exhibit #3 - Support

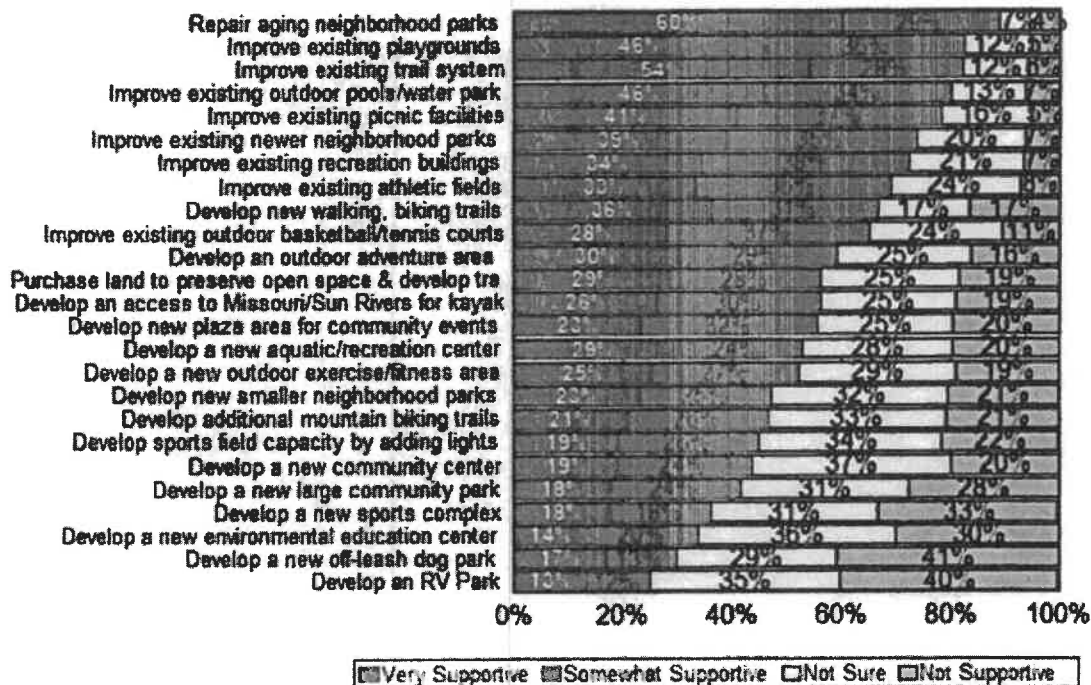
4.3.8 SUPPORT TO IMPROVE PARKS, TRAILS AND THE RECREATION SYSTEM

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for 25 potential actions that the City of Great Falls could take to improve the parks, trails, and recreation system.

- Supported Actions: Based on the percentage of respondents who indicated they were either "very supportive" or "somewhat supportive", 89% indicated repair aging neighborhood parks. Other most supported actions include: Improve existing playgrounds (82%), improve existing trail system (82%), improve existing outdoor pools/water park (80%), and improve existing picnic facilities (78%).

Q12. Respondent Level of Support for New/Improved Parks, Trails, and Recreation System

by percentage of respondents



Source: ETC Institute (2016)

CUP Meeting for the Indoor Sports and Recreation Center

Public Comment

March 23, 2021

If I went before a Bank, Government Guarantee Program, business, or any sort of financial institution and asked for \$20 million to build an architecturally awesome Recreation Center, the very first thing they would say is:

"How will you pay for this and show us your business plan to keep it viable in the future".

The paying for, I can understand - a \$10 million Department of Defense Grant, matched with another \$10 million achieved through a financial sleight of hand. So, you will really do not have a capital investment to pay back, but you do have to pay for the bond taken out against the Park District Tax Assessment at some point.

What I don't understand is how you plan on paying for day-to-day operations, without increasing taxes to all Great Falls residents (I have experience in this process, having run a fitness consulting business, throughout the US, for the past 30 years).

Over the previous few weeks, I have asked (as well as several of my staff) the City for the financial proforma and/or the budgetary Profit and Loss for the Aim High Big Sky Rec Center. To date, we have only received extremely vague answers and promises to answer by City. Mostly, they just ignore our questions, hoping we will go away. The closest we have come to answers is at public meetings, where some City official repeats the mantra of "We have taken the income and expenses for the Natatorium and gymnasium, then based the new Rec Center income and expenses on those numbers". Really? The only commonality between the Nat and the Rec Center is a hole in the ground with a bit of warm pool water contained within. But even with those questions, no numbers are produced, just ambiguous statements.

I can tell you, with the utmost confidence, had I approached ANY financial institution asking for \$20 million and gave them those answers, I would be out on my ear faster that you could say "We don't give out free lunches here, buddy".


The City of Great Falls should be treated no differently. The City works for the people of Great Falls and spends the money given to them by these people. If a project pushed by the City (and NOT voted on by the people) is built, using taxpayer funds, claimed to be financially viable, and then loses vast amounts of funds - where will those funds come from? Will the City Staff and Commissioners, who aggressively promoted this project, reach into their pockets to make up the difference? Of course not - they only have the responsibility to spend your money! Their only option is to reach into YOUR pocket and makeup the shortfall with YOUR tax dollars - whether you use the facility or not! But the best part? Once built, there will be no choice at all about raising your taxes to support this facility - or you face losing your shiny new Rec

Center (and all the bonding that went with it). Starting to sound a little like the Highwood Generating Station?

The people of Great Falls deserve to see the financial details of a project they are paying for, both in construction and operation. They deserve the right to have an informed opinion on a project that may affect their lives. What they do not deserve is to have the Aim High Big Sky Rec Center shoved down their throat, because a few government officials feel it is "good for them".

So, I ask: When will full financial disclosure take place for the construction and operation of Aim High Big Sky Center be available? Remember, citizens of Great Falls, your elected officials work for YOU and owe YOU answers to these questions.

Doug Mahlum
Ownership Group for the Peak Health and Wellness

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'DM', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.