

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**May 20, 2025 -- City Commission Work Session**  
**Civic Center, Gibson Room 212 -- Mayor Reeves Presiding**

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

**ROLL CALL/STAFF INTRODUCTIONS:**

City Commission members present: Cory Reeves, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon and Shannon Wilson. Commissioner Susan Wolff was excused.

Also present were Interim City Manager Bryan Lockerby; City Attorney David Dennis; Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Development Review Coordinator Mark Juras and City Engineer Jesse Patton; Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry; Fire Marshall Mike McIntosh; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Richard Irving**, City resident, opined that the library is run by a small group of people that have been friends or relatives, and it is run as a personal party, not for the city as a whole. Mr. Irving recommended appointing library board members who are not a recommendation from the library director or library board.

**WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. EPA LEAD AND COPPER RULE IMPROVEMENTS (LCR) UPDATE**

Public Works Development Review Coordinator Mark Juras reported that lead, galvanized and unknown service lines will need to be replaced over a 10-year period starting in 2027. The current city policy and code states that a property owner is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the entire length of the service line from the main in the street to their residence. Partial replacements of non-conforming service lines do not count towards a mandatory replacement. The city must document four separate attempts to contact property owners who are not willing to replace non-conforming service lines. The city must prepare and make available on the City's website a service line replacement plan starting in 2027. Lead tests occur from tap samples inside a home and there are no sources of lead in the City's Water Treatment Plant water distribution system. There will be more public notice and education requirements for LCR improvements.

There were approximately 10,000 unknown service line types out of 22,000 in 2022, 10,000 notices were mailed in July 2022, November 2023 to April 2024, 7,000 phone

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calls were made, 5,000 notices were mailed to the remaining unknown service line addresses in November 2024 and 4,000 door knocks/hangars January to April 2025. Currently there are approximately 4,000 unknown service lines and only those who receive notice that they have an unknown service line need to respond. Staff are better informed and considering next steps to increase response rates and/or ID service line materials with incentives, potholing or water shut off. In the event the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) forces the city to replace non-conforming locations, the potential future impact to ratepayer's water bill could be approximately \$7/Month or \$28/Month. The goal is to identify material of all unknown water service lines, required by the EPA.

The city is moving forward with a pilot project to replace 20 known lead service lines. The project is a ratepayer funded State Revolving Fund (SRF) 2.5%, 20-year loan through the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) with a 60% principal forgiveness. The next step is to reach out to these potential replacement locations and have them enter into an agreement with the city to replace that water service line. City staff are prioritizing individuals who are voluntarily participating in a Tier 1 tap sampling program. Staff are anticipating having a reimbursement resolution and construction contract sometime by the end of fall 2025.

Per EPA regulations, a replacement plan is due, must be available on the city's website and submitted to the DEQ in November 2027. The replacement plan will include strategies for identifying remaining unknowns, conducting replacements, communications, replacement prioritization, funding strategy and identifying specific laws. The replacement plan needs to be updated annually. Development Review Coordinator Juras discussed monitoring and tap sampling. Effective today, corrosion control is being implemented at the Water Treatment Plant and the current action level for lead is 15 parts per billion (ppb). Annual letters are being mailed to non-conforming locations, as well as operating water valve, line disturbance and partial replacement notices to other non-conforming locations. System wide notices include non-conforming addresses on the city's website and to DEQ. Effective 2027, the action level for lead will go down to 10 ppb, the first and fifth liter will be required to be sampled for lead and there will be more public education and noticing requirements. There will be documented replacement attempts, replacement rate failure, DEQ reporting and notifications will increase.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the sister cities are making similar efforts as Great Falls for unknown line identification by mailing letters, going door to door and some are hiring consultants. He further received clarification that potholing would be an expensive way to identify unknown lines.

Regarding the "Potential Future Impact to Ratepayer" slide, Commissioner Tryon expressed concern about taxpayers paying \$7 or \$28 for non-conforming service lines

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in addition to the upcoming adjusted rates. He inquired if the city would be legally forced to pay for replacing non-conforming service lines.

Development Review Coordinator Juras responded that it is uncertain at this time what would happen if the city does not meet those replacement rates; however, the city would potentially be fined by the EPA. Ratepayers nationwide are being asked to fund this.

City Attorney David Dennis's response was inaudible.

Mayor Reeves commented that he discussed with Congressman Downing team about the huge unfunded federal mandate forthcoming. Each congressman can put approximately \$30 million into certain projects, and could choose to apply it to the LCR updates.

Public Works City Engineer Jesse Patton explained that the city is attempting to compare those costs before shutting water off or potholing is considered. If individuals do not want to participate, it is documented four times before they are off the list and would not count against the city. Based on the current rule, individuals do not have to participate; however, City staff must monitor that property every time it changes hands. The current plan is to require property owners to replace the lines or utilize grant monies that are available through the pilot project.

### **2. UPDATE ON GROWTH MANAGEMENT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

Referring to the Growth Policy, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reported that public engagement is required by the Montana Land-Use Planning Act (MLUPA) and Article II, Sections 8 and 9 of the State Constitution guarantees the public's right to participate in government and access public deliberations. It builds a legally defensible plan, and this Growth Policy is the people's plan. FutureGreatFalls.com received over 3,700 visits and served as the hub for updates, surveys, and feedback tools. There were over 70 meetings and events including workshops, roundtables, school sessions, neighborhood councils, and civic group presentations. There were nearly four times the participation of the 2013 Growth Policy. Over 2,300 residents shared their perspectives on the future of Great Falls. Housing availability/affordability, cost of living, public safety, public infrastructure, and downtown revitalization were the top community priorities. The top five priorities are not exclusive to what the Growth Policy will cover.

Housing availability and affordability were the most consistent priorities. There was a clear desire to balance larger-scale development with housing that maintains the character of established areas and supports long-term affordability. Residents are concerned about the cost of living, particularly property taxes and city service costs,

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especially for fixed-income households and retirees. Public safety was consistently ranked amongst the most important issue in the community survey and across public meetings, thought cards, and student feedback. Residents want safe neighborhoods, faster response, and visible presence. This does not mean the public lacks confidence in first responders. Rather, residents want to ensure that as Great Falls grows, public safety grows with it. Residents want smart investments in core services such as the water system, sewer and streets. Downtown was one of the most frequently discussed topics across the entire engagement process, cited as both a top success and a key area for continued investment. A draft Growth Policy should be ready for review by winter 2026.

Mayor Reeves commented that two of the top priorities, cost of living and public infrastructure, seem to be at complete odds with one another.

Public Works Director Cherry responded that those two priorities were components of a draft policy, and these questions were asked very broadly.

Commissioner McKenney received clarification that the Steering Committee will be retired at the conclusion of the Growth Policy. Their current task is to take this information to help find growth principles. Staff are working with Communications Specialist Meredith Dawson to help explain how this works.

Commissioner Wilson commented that the report shows how the public wanted to see oversight regarding how things are designed. Commissioner Wilson added that she will continue to push for public restrooms downtown because the public wants it.

Commissioner Tryon commented that public engagement and responses were one of the best the consultant has seen. Commissioner Tryon cautioned about drawing conclusions about what the public wants regarding specifics, other than the top five community priorities. However, even that is a small portion of the overall community. He inquired how the cost of living is related to the Growth Policy since that document has to do with land use issues within the community.

Planning and Community Development Director Cherry responded that the Growth Policy is the paramount document to form the city's zoning ordinance policy. Staff are passionate about educating the public about how the Growth Policy is being used.

Commissioner Tryon commented that educating the public is important because many people do not understand what the purpose of a Growth Policy is.

## **DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS**

Interim City Manager Bryan Lockerby reported that library board interviews will be a topic for the June 3, 2025 work session. FY26 proposed budget will be a topic for the June 17,

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2025 work session. FY26 proposed budget will be topics for the June 25 and 26, 2025 special work session, if needed.

### **ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of May 20, 2025 at 6:25 p.m.