

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
July 1, 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, Shannon Wilson, and Susan Wolff.

Also present were City Manager Greg Doyon, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler and Deputy Finance Director Kirsten Wavra, Municipal Court Judges Steve Bolstad and Mark Dunn and Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ben Forsyth, City resident, commented that in the 14 work sessions he has presented about the harms of marijuana, the City Commission has not responded in a positive way about discussing this so it can have the knowledge to make the best decisions about this issue. Mr. Forsyth opined that the Commission is creating support for the harms of marijuana that are affecting people in the community. He requested that the Commission do its job according to Article 2, Sections 3 and 4 of the Constitution of the State of Montana, as well as several other existing State laws.

Richard Irving, City resident, commented that the Great Falls Public Library has blown the Commission's non-partisan cover again when it reappointed a member to the Library Board. It became easy for the Library Director and Board to partner with a democratic party to espouse the democratic party version of the history of Juneteenth rather than the neutral version. Mr. Irving suggested that the Commission do not allow the library to have the area for children in the basement when the library does its remodeling.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. FY2026 MUNICIPAL COURT BUDGET PRESENTATION

Municipal Court Judge Steve Bolstad reported that the Court is not a money-maker for the City and it distributes justice. The \$100,000 shortfall in fines and forfeitures on the Court's budget is a symptom of a larger problem. The failing of the Public Safety Levy has changed community policing, enforcement, the security of the City, and increased traffic citations and warrants being issued. The Great Falls Police Department (GFPD)

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has gone mainly to reactive policing to violent crimes, which takes officers away from minor offenses.

Judge Bolstad provided and discussed a May 29, 2025 GFPD statistic handout that was prepared to see the results of a problem Municipal Court was having with the Cascade County Detention Center accepting misdemeanor violators at the jail. There were 4,007 GFPD citations issued in 2025 and several more were issued in dates prior. There were 507 Failed to Appear Warrants issued in 2025 compared to 151 in 2020. Individuals do not show up because they know there are no consequences for failing to appear on a warrant. There is no jail space, individuals can be turned away and the county is not funding it the way it should be. There were 65.20 inmates per month in 2025 and 79.33 in 2020. If jail is not there as a deterrent, it works contrary to what Municipal Court is trying to do. These shortfalls will continue and potentially double if something is not done. Judge Bolstad concluded that he is not sure if there are any other choices besides trying another Public Safety Levy or issue a bond and building a City jail.

Municipal Court Judge Mark Dunn explained that factors that play into the reduction in fines included the shortfall of officers who now must be reactive versus proactive. Before the Court can impose a fine, it must make an inquiry as to an individual's ability to pay a fine. If it is determined that an individual cannot pay a fine, it will be reduced, suspended or not imposed based on a Supreme Court decision. The Court cannot impose a fine based on an individual's inability to pay and jail time could be imposed instead. Legislative initiatives will also influence the reduction in fines.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the Cascade County Pre-Trial Program has not been in collaboration with Municipal Court.

City Manager Greg Doyon inquired what happens to a community if criminal behavior is incentivized when they are allowed to get away with misdemeanors time after time.

Judge Bolstad responded that misdemeanors add up and if criminals realize there is no discipline or consequences, it can lead to worse circumstances. Several individuals with misdemeanors are the same individuals with felonies and many defendants with homicides are defendants in Municipal Court. All of this worries him as a resident of Great Falls and as a judge.

Judge Dunn added that there was an individual in Municipal Court with 31 warrants for failing to appear. Individuals lose respect for the court and law enforcement because there is no accountability and become bolder when there are no consequences.

Commissioner Tryon inquired if there will be more incarcerations from the City at the jail once the construction there is completed and what the major contributing factor is as to why the fines are down.

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Judge Bolstad responded that he had been assured that they will; however, he was informed that there are already too many individuals incarcerated and was asked to get some out. The major contributing factor as to why fines are down is because the Public Safety Levy did not pass. Now the City is doing reactive policing and there is a lack of jail space.

Municipal Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec added that there was also a decline in fines when the legislature passed a law where the Court could not suspend driver's licenses for failure to pay. Court is doing well with collections which helps support past paid fines that would not have been paid. In general, there is a change of tone with regard to court and authority. The canned food drive, where individuals can have \$50 removed from their fines, is down also.

Commissioner Tryon commented that having a City jail again needs to be considered. There needs to be alternative forms of punishment so there is accountability for individuals who cannot pay their fines.

Judge Dunn responded that community service, house arrest or pre-release are other effective alternatives.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that house arrest costs \$10 daily and pre-release is over \$30 daily. If defendants cannot pay fines, they more than likely cannot for those options.

Commissioner McKenney received clarification that two courtrooms will be running at the same time once the renovation is complete.

2. 2026 PROPOSED BUDGET DISCUSSION, CONTINUED FROM JUNE 26, 2025

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that he would provide a list of the Above and Beyond Requests to the Commission.

Finance Director Melissa Kinzler and Deputy Finance Director Kirsten Wavra reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office) regarding the Fiscal year 2026 Great Falls Budget. Highlights included:

- General Fund Recap.
- City-Wide Revenues.
- Proposed Assessment and Utility Rate Adjustments.
- City-Wide Expenses.
- City-Wide Expenses by Category.

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- City-Wide Expenses by Function.
- Capital Outlay, Pages 127-131.
- Employee Summary, Pages 121-126.
- Fund Review, Fund Detail Worksheet.
- Upcoming Budget Process.

Finance Director Kinzler explained that the amount from the entitlement share was less than anticipated because the State of Montana received less revenue and on average has been increasing every year approximately \$300,000. There is approximately \$4.3 million of tax revenue in Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts; however, that money cannot be used for general fund support and can only be used for public improvements in those districts.

City Manager Doyon explained that TIF districts are one of the few economic development tools the City has; however, there is an impact on the budget when the City utilizes them.

Commissioner McKenney commented that when there is economic development in the community, it is in TIF districts.

City Manager Doyon mentioned that there was a unique development agreement when Portage Meadows subdivision was constructed. The agreement was that there would be public green space and the City would maintain it. Years ago, he tried to ensure that the City is not inadvertently subsidizing the maintenance that occurs there and charging the cost for the service. There is a legal way to undo what was done when that subdivision was created.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that page 133 of the FY2026 Proposed Budget lists the long-term debt schedule.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that a workforce housing/TIF semi-annual update and FY26 proposed budget (if needed) will be topics for the July 15, 2025 work session.

Commissioner Tryon requested that an update about Scheels Aim High Big Sky (SAH BS), Park and Rec, Civic Center and Multi-Sports be added to an upcoming work session after this year's budget process is over.

Manager Doyon responded that it might be a little early to add to an upcoming work session. After an award is made on the RFP, the consultant could provide the City with its

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recommendations. Next year's budget will start early, and he recommended having quarterly budget meetings with the Commission to identify potential savings or service reductions. The RFP is for a Comprehensive Fee Study, Cost Allocation Plan, and Park and Recreation Operational Efficiency Review.

Commissioner Wolff commented that she is not sure that the public is aware of everything SAHBS has to offer unless they go into the facility.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of July 1, 2025 at 6:49 p.m.