

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
July 15, 2025 – City Commission Work Session
Civic Center, Commission Chambers, Room 206 –
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 and Interim Deputy City Manager Bryan Lockerby, City Attorney David Dennis, Public Works Deputy Director Lonnie Hill, Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

Mayor Reeves reported that Calumet requested to give presentations to the City Commission regarding its upcoming projects that intersect with the City.

Commissioner Wolff responded that Calumet could provide public meetings at its site because of the busy load of the work sessions.

Commissioner McKenney responded that he supports Calumet providing updates to the Commission because it is the City's number one taxpayer.

Commissioner Wilson concurred with Commissioner Wolff's comments.

Commissioner Tryon responded that Calumet could provide a community update periodically at City Commission meetings, because work sessions are usually reserved for issues that may be on an agenda.

Calumet Refinery Vice President of Government Relations Krista Evans commented that Calumet wants to be more transparent about what projects it is working on, and presentations would take approximately 15 minutes.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission to have Calumet provide public meetings at its site.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Written correspondence expressed support of banning fireworks in the City was received from **Gordon Whirry** (via July 8, 2025 email), **Bruce Pollington** (via July 10, 2025 email), **Carol Bronson** (via July 11, 2025 email), **Anitra Hall** (via July 15, 2025 email), **Tammy**

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Nathe (via July 13, 2025 email), **Lisa Hardiman**(via July 14, 2025 email), **Pam Guschausky** (via July 14, 2025 email), **Dick and Melodee Scott** (via July 14, 2025 email), **Robert Jordan** (via July 10, 2025 written correspondence), **Janet Henderson** (via July 15, 2025 email), **Carrie Reisig** (via 7/15/25 email), **Candice Griffith** (via July 15, 2025 email),

Ben Forsyth, City resident, commented that this is the 15th work session where he has presented scientifically documented harms of marijuana and the City Commission has not consented to discussing. Mr. Forsyth provided and discussed a research study handout about the harms of marijuana.

Ron Paulick, City resident, provided a prepared statement regarding a July 11, 2025 email titled Utility Rate Increased to Fund Infrastructure Needs.

Carol Bradley, 1826 3rd Avenue North, commented that she used to love the 4th of July holiday but now dreads it because the fireworks in Great Falls have completely gotten out of hand. Ms. Bradley added that she hopes that the death of the elderly woman whose house caught on fire because of a firework serves as a tipping point to the Commission to show leadership on behalf of the thousands of City residents who do not like fireworks. Ms. Bradley expressed concern about the impact that fireworks have on people, animals, veterans and individuals with PTSD.

Candice Griffith, City resident, commented that she is a twenty-year retired major of the Montana Army National Guard and is requesting a change to the city ordinance which allows fireworks to be discharged in city limits. It is unfortunate that it took the untimely death of an elderly woman and her pets for this issue to be addressed. She understands the importance of freedom and the celebration of it. However, she requested, as a veteran who was exposed to indirect fire attacks, a dog handler for PTSD and concerned citizen, that the Commission consider limiting fireworks on the 4th of July and New Year holidays to be discharged outside of city limits and by approved permit only. Ms. Griffith expressed concern that fireworks are discharged in the City outside of the approved dates, preventing individuals from sleeping, creating litter and posing the risk of fire and death.

Shannon Linns, City resident, commented that fireworks being shot off by individuals in the City are extremely loud, it is like being in a warzone and unnecessary when there is a City display. Ms. Linns expressed opposition to personal fireworks in the City.

Rick George, a non-city resident, commented that he works at a fireworks stand and is concerned about limiting what individuals can do and taking away stuff people loved as kids. Back in the day, people and dogs were fine and he does not know what difference it makes now. Mr. George commented that the lady who passed away ran back into a burning building to save a cat, and the cause of the fire was possibly fireworks. If fireworks are prohibited in the City, then other things need to be prohibited as well. He expressed concern about the enforcement if fireworks are banned in the City.

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Pete Anderson, 4044 Ella Avenue, suggested that the Commission consider a pay-to-play permit system regarding fireworks to generate additional revenue for the City. Mr. Anderson expressed opposition to prohibition measures, especially when it has been a tradition for a long time. He requested a work session about using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds for Downtown Workforce Housing.

Referring to Mr. Anderson's request, Mayor Reeves responded that the City is currently exploring downtown TIF's.

Garla Boland, commented that she does not understand why a one-day holiday needs to last and be celebrated for three days or longer.

Julie Essex, City resident, commented that she suffers from sleep deprivation during the 4th of July and her dog suffers from PTSD whenever there are fireworks. She previously lived in Denver, CO, where there is a ban on the purchase, sale and ignition of fireworks. People would drive to Cheyenne, WY and ignite them in Denver and there was never any enforcement on the fireworks ban. Having another ordinance that is not going to be enforced because of the lack of funding public safety is going to create an additional number of criminals in the City and completely banning fireworks is not the solution.

Michael Maeder, 2407 Central Avenue West, commented that previously, the ignition of fireworks was for 12 days and now it is for three days. It is ironic that people want to take away the ability to celebrate freedom in a traditional way. Mr. Maeder added that the fireworks do not go off all night and they tone down around midnight. He is a combat veteran diagnosed with PTSD and has sold fireworks to other veterans with PTSD at his fireworks stand. Taking fireworks away from those who love it is beyond his understanding. No one pays attention to laws and fireworks are still ignited in every City in Montana that has a ban.

Destri Hilbig, City resident, commented that it has not been proven that the lady who died from the fire was from fireworks. Ms. Hilbig added that the lady did not die from fireworks, she died from a fire that she went back into. The lady was also a hoarder, and her grass was too high, in which there is an ordinance for; however, law enforcement does not have time to enforce. She suggested that the Commission focus on the things that it already has happening that it cannot handle and find ways to manage them before it adds more to the police force that is struggling as it is.

Greg Hall, City resident, commented that he is on the People's Park and Rec Foundation that is responsible for putting on a fireworks show for one night on the 4th of July every year. He likes the ignition of fireworks in a controlled environment versus in neighborhoods because the types of fireworks being set off in neighborhoods are like professional grade fireworks. He expressed support of having a fireworks ban be put on a ballot.

Jeff Thill, City resident, commented that he is a fireworks operator, has approximately 10,000 unique sales to individuals a year and sells fireworks to Helena and Bozeman. The

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other cities in Montana that have outlawed fireworks light off just as many fireworks within the city limits. Mr. Thill expressed support of controlling the rules that the City has in place. Mr. Thill commented that his dogs love fireworks; however, he sympathizes with people who have dogs that do not like them. The City has the smallest grade of fireworks that can be ignited. There are large organizations that look at the number of fireworks sold and the number of injuries per 1,000 pounds of fireworks. Fireworks sales have gone up since the 1970's and injuries have gone down. If fireworks are banned, they will still be sold in the County and ignited inside the City.

Mayor Reeves announced that the Workforce Housing TIF update would be moved to agenda item 2.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. CITY COMMISSION DISCUSSION ON FIREWORKS

Mayor Reeves inquired if a fireworks ban would be another ordinance that the Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) would not be able to enforce.

Police Chief Jeff Newton responded that since June 1, 2025 to today, GFPD has responded to 5,138 calls for service and written 1,542 reports. GFPD is running approximately 116 calls per day with 14 officers in the field over a 24-hour time frame. Priority calls require more officers to respond and impacts all public safety departments. It comes down to resource management and allocation of resources. GFPD must prioritize calls and if it receives a firework complaint versus a gun, it will send its resources to where the priority call is.

Commissioner Wilson expressed concern for individuals with PTSD and veterans who are in recovery or in the Veterans Treatment Court because fireworks can be a trigger for them. Commissioner Wilson expressed support of putting it on a ballot and not an ordinance.

Commissioner Wolff commented that there were large fireworks in her neighborhood that exceeded three days. She understands people wanting to celebrate the founding of this country. However, the lady who died in the house fire had a right to live and a right to have a safe home. If she was a hoarder, that had nothing to do with the fact that a fire was started in her area and went into her home. The Commission needs to step up and make the decision about fireworks. Commissioner Wolff expressed support of banning personal fireworks and putting in place things to help the GFPD and GFFR, such as budgeting for overtime and instituting heavy fines for those not following the law. She commented that she is aware that banning fireworks would have an impact on the livelihood for those selling fireworks; however, it is not going to stop with this one lady, not with the kind of fireworks being shot off. She understands that people will go to the County to get fireworks, but she cannot say it is okay when there was a loss of life.

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Commissioner Tryon explained that the issue of fireworks comes up every year from individuals who are concerned and frustrated about the level of fireworks going on in residential neighborhoods. He started this initiative because of the people who have concerns about personal fireworks in the City and they deserve to have their concerns addressed. The Commission needs to ensure those individuals that it is not ignoring their concerns. The two options are to either put it on a ballot in November 2025 or have the City Commission vote on it. Commissioner Tryon proposed having Legal staff draft a resolution that would prohibit the sale and discharge of fireworks within the city limits and either put it on the ballot or have the City Commission vote on it. He explained that his preference is to put it on a ballot; however, there would be a short timeline to do that.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the three questions before the Commission are if fireworks should be limited in some fashion, can it be enforced, and who makes the decision. He is not ready to make a decision tonight and would like another work session to have options presented to the Commission such as keeping it as is, limiting fireworks or a ban. He expressed support of the City Commission making the decision and not putting it on a ballot.

Mayor Reeves explained that he cannot support any ordinance prohibiting or limiting the discharge of fireworks until GFRD and GFRR can adequately enforce and manage the call loads on the 4th of July and enforce what is in the books currently.

Commissioner Wolff expressed support of having another work session to hear from the GFRD and GFRR about the impact it would have on their departments.

City Attorney David Dennis reported that the last day for the first reading would be July 30, 2025, the last day for the second reading for a resolution and ordinance would be August 11, 2025 and would require special meetings.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he does not want to keep discussing this issue repeatedly at work sessions. He suggested having a straightforward resolution that is voted on regarding the prohibition of fireworks in the city limits unless there is a permit.

Commissioner Wolff concurred with Commissioner Tryon; however, the Commission was elected to make hard decisions. Commissioner Wolff suggested creating a resolution that bans fireworks and with that, making sure there is enough money in the budget for overtime for the GFRD and GFRR.

It was the consensus of the Commission to have another special work session.

Mayor Reeves clarified that Commissioners McKenney and Wolff suggested that the decision should be made by the Commission. Commissioners Wilson and Tryon suggested that it should be on a ballot. Mayor Reeves agreed to a ballot but with options. He commented that the Commission needs to be mindful about City staff having the time and resources to compile everything needed prior to next Wednesday.

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Commissioner Wolff announced that she would be gone from August 6 to August 16, 2025.

City Manager Doyon explained that he would propose some dates to the Commission for a special work session about what the ballot language and ordinance would look like.

2. WORKFORCE HOUSING/TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) UPDATE

Due to the lack of time, the Workforce Housing/TIF update will be rescheduled to another work session.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

Due to the lack of time, there was no discussion of potential upcoming work session topics.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of July 15, 2025 at 6:50 p.m.