

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
August 19, 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 and Deputy City Manager Bryan Lockerby, Deputy City Attorney Rachel Taylor, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Interim Park and Recreation Director Jessica Compton and Park Manager Kevin Vining, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry and Deputy Director Lonnie Hill, Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy Clerk Darcy Dea.

Mayor Reeves reported that agenda item 1 was pulled and will be added back onto a Work Session once City staff has an opportunity to meet with County staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Written comments were received from **Sarah Willis**, (via August 17, 2025 email), **Bob Kelly** (via August 18, 2025 email), and **Bill Wadman** (via August 18, 2025 email) in support of agenda item 3.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

**1. OPIOID METRO REGION GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PROPOSED
INTERLOCAL AGREEMENT FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION –
CONTINUED FROM AUGUST 5, 2025.**

*PULLED

**2. DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICT – WORKFORCE HOUSING
PROGRAM UPDATE.**

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included:

- Workforce Housing Recap – What is Workforce Housing?

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

- Per the MCA, Workforce housing is housing affordable to households whose income is between 60% and 140% of the area median income (AMI), as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- What does that mean for Great Falls.
 - Household size with 1 person, 60% AMI is \$36,120; 140% AMI is \$84,280.
 - Household size with 2 persons, 60% AMI is \$41,280; 140% AMI is \$96,640).
 - Household size with 3 persons, 60% AMI is \$46,440; 140% AMI is \$108,360.
- Our Mission Started with Public Priorities. As identified in the recent Growth Policy Survey and reinforced through feedback from Downtown business owners, property owners, and design professionals during informational sessions on May 28th and 29th included:
 - Upper-Floor Housing: Add homes above retail to maximize existing space.
 - Reinvestment in Historic Buildings: Preserve Great Falls' character while creating modern housing.
 - Blight Removal: Turn vacant or deteriorated properties into community assets.
 - A Thriving, Livable Downtown: Support 18-hour activity and economic resilience through added residential presence.
- Missoula's TIF-Funded Workforce Housing. Missoula is the only Montana city actively using TIF for workforce housing. Project spotlight-Scott Street-Ravara Housing Development:
 - Key Partners:
 - Missoula Redevelopment Agency (City) – TIF Administration.
 - Homeward & Trust Montana-Community Land rust and Compliance.
 - Ravara Development, LLC-Private development team.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

- Total: 314 units:
 - 89 for-sale homes (46 income-qualified).
 - 225 market-rate rentals 160 units (51%) reserved for households 120% (e.g., \$72,600/year for a 1-person household).
 - 160 units (51%) reserved for households 120% AMI.
- Site Plan (9 acres):
 - 3-acre Community Land Trust:
 - 46 income-qualified homes.
 - 43 market-rate homes.
 - 5-acre mixed-use development:
 - 225 rental apartments.
 - 35,000 sq ft of commercial space: childcare, grocery, and community hub.
- Missoula Key Takeaways:
 - Larger projects succeed when paired with a partner (nonprofit, housing authority, developer) to manage income compliance.
 - Smaller projects without a compliance partner face higher risk and administrative burden, often outweighing the benefit.
- Biggest Challenges:
 - Income Compliance Complexity. Ensuring TIF-supported units stay within workforce income limits requires ongoing income verification, legal agreements, and monitoring. This makes small-scale projects, like upper-floor conversions, challenging to implement without a partner to manage compliance long-term.
 - Limited Support for Workforce Tier. Organizations like NeighborWorks can assist with income compliance, but their focus is typically on subsidized or lower-income housing. While valuable, this doesn't fully address the need for market-rate or higher-tier workforce housing support.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

- Next Steps – Pilot Program Considerations:
 - A pilot workforce housing program can move forward, but:
 - May not meet original goals for moderate-income housing.
 - Unlikely to support simple upper-floor renovations by existing property owners.
 - More likely to benefit from new construction with subsidized housing partners.
 - Does not address the large inventory of vacant downtown upper floors.
- Next Steps towards market housing development Downtown?
 - Explore sending out a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit interest in building market rate housing on City-Owned Property Downtown (surface parking lots).
 - Explore property tax abatements/exemptions. Time-limited relief on the value added by rehab (often 5-10 years). Does not address the large inventory of vacant downtown upper floors.

Building Permit Fee reductions, specifically for existing downtown vacant buildings.

Mayor Reeves inquired if a program like this would be eligible for CDBG HOME funding and if the best results would be with a partner group.

Director Cherry responded that CDBG HOME funding could be added to the capital stack for a project if it is in a qualifying district. The city does not have the capacity to provide income compliance in perpetuity and would need to partner with an existing non-profit or create a community land trust.

Commissioner Wolff commented that the former Bon Marche building would make a great place for some form of housing. She received clarification that a TIF award and private investment was used to redo the old Johnson Hotel.

Planning and Community Development Deputy Director Lonnie Hill explained that people who owned buildings downtown were concerned about all the requirements and non-profit agencies consider this as another tool to put into that capital stack to make these projects work. The estimated number to remodel upper floors downtown

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

is over \$200,000 a unit. Another tool that has been successful is the TIF Building Program for life safety and permits.

Commissioner McKenney inquired if a person who fit that workforce income was to remodel units into condos and later decided to sell to a higher income person, if it would still be locked into that perpetuity.

Director Cherry responded that once a TIF award is utilized based on that workforce funding, the city is obligated as the awarding jurisdiction, to ensure that it remains as such in perpetuity. The city is still not hitting the mark based on the Growth Policy Survey and Town Hall meeting; however, he wants to make an intentional effort towards getting that desire of filling empty spaces downtown.

Commissioner Wolff commented that good things happen when starting small and if this is kept in front of people, it could grow into what the original intent was.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about surface parking lots and if there are any other TIF Districts, outside of downtown, that this tool could be used with a non-profit partner that could monitor the income compliance requirements.

Director Cherry responded that the Westbank TIF District has opportunity for some more greenfield development; however, he does not want to lose the momentum that the community is hoping for with filling up downtown. With regard to surface parking lots, the city can be very descriptive with a Request for Proposals (RFP) about the outcomes it expects for specific locations.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the RFP reminds the private sector that the mindset of the Planning and Community Development department has changed and lets the community know that the city is open for business.

It was the consensus of the Commission to have Director Cherry move forward and explore all options.

Mayor Reeves explained that Commissioner Wilson is present and watching the meeting from another location because her allergies are bad tonight.

3. REQUEST OF CITY PROPERTY FOR THE NEW TOBY'S HOUSE CRISIS NURSERY.

City Manager Greg Doyon explained that City staff have been engaged with representatives from Toby's House for a while. Part of the challenge is per city code, there is no clear pathway when there is interest in acquiring city property and the sale, purchase or lease of city land is cumbersome.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

Toby's House Crisis Nursery Executive Director Leesha Ford reported that Toby's House Crisis Nursery is a local non-profit serving children ages 0-6 and their families in the Great Falls community since December 2020. The nursery is committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect providing crisis and respite care, as well as some transitional care for families waiting for availability at a daycare. The nursery was recognized by Montana Children's Trust Fund as the Montana Nonprofit Organization of the year in 2022.

The origin of Toby's House Crisis Nursery is rooted in a tragic span of years in which Great Falls lost numerous lives to child abuse and neglect. In 2024, Toby's House provided over 4000 hours of care, helped over 100 new children and their families, and has been a community resource center for diapers, formula, clothing and more. Currently located at 421 5th St North, the nursery's rental site has limited space, and its layout does not support the community's needs long-term. The Nursery would need to be near downtown for walking accessibility and is best suited for an area in a city park, to fully maximize benefits to the city's children and families.

The nursery is funded through private donors and grants/foundations and is growing its program services that support operational funding. Families using the nursery do not need to meet income criteria, and services are at no cost to families. The nursery operates from 8am to 11:59 pm (or when last child leaves) Monday through Friday and has an expansion grant from Montana Children's Trust Fund for initiating weekend hours which has been 9am to 3pm on Saturdays to provide resources and in the future will include childcare on weekends. The crisis nursery was a 2014 committee/project of the Early Childhood Coalition to address child abuse and neglect in Great Falls. Eleven years later, the committee incorporated as a nonprofit, opened the state's first crisis nursery, and has a contract with Bright Futures Birth to 5 Project to pilot a mentorship to replicate our success in another Montana Community.

The nursery provides support for families struggling with crisis and emergency, families needing a break from a crying baby, health and mental health needs, sobriety support, and supports the city's workforce when their daycare, school, or HeadStart is closed, and when childcare plans fall through at the last minute. Toby's House Crisis Nursery's services are a vital part of our city's economic and workforce development, ensuring workers can take a job even though the daycare they enrolled at cannot take their child for another two months. Toby's House Crisis Nursery 'minds the gap' and collaborates with many entities to ensure we have a thriving, family-friendly community.

The community has an urgent need for a new crisis nursery site, and Ms. Ford requested that the city commit to either a long-term lease or a parcel of land inside a park.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

Ms. Ford read from a prepared statement that stated the following: “The question has been raised why Toby’s House needs to be in a park and why not a parking lot, or some patch of pavement where the sun bakes the ground and no one lingers? The answer is simple, because we’re not talking about cars, we are talking about children. Not teenagers with earbuds and independence, but babies and toddlers. Not prisoners at the jail, out walking the yard, but tiny humans still learning to walk, to speak, to trust the world. And what kind of world are we building if the best we offer them is concrete? Children of Great Falls deserve more than a slab of asphalt. They deserve trees that bend in the wind, grass they can tumble into without scraping their knees, a swing set that whispers: You are safe here. You are wanted here. You are a child, not a burden. Parks are not a luxury, they are a promise. And Toby’s House is in the promise-keeping business.

So why Carter Park? Because it’s one of the smallest, but one of the least used parks. Other neighborhood and pocket parks like Kranz, Roosevelt, and Boston Heights are nestled in neighborhoods already rich with housing, families, and play. Carter Park is different. It sits on the edge, between hope and hardship. It is one of the least known, least used, and perhaps most overlooked green spaces in the city. And that makes it the one most full of possibility. Its location as a site for a partnership with Toby’s House is no accident. It’s within walking distance of the homeless shelter, the YWCA, and regular meeting places for AA and NA. It’s in a neighborhood with high poverty, high addiction, and some of the city’s most at-risk children. That’s where the need is greatest. And that’s what Toby’s House is all about.

When it comes to parks and green spaces, our city’s charter asks for joint public-private efforts like this, ones that don’t just make life better, but make it safer. Toby’s House doesn’t need a park because it’s nice. It needs part of a park because it’s necessary. Because a child should grow up believing there’s always a soft place to land. Toby’s House wouldn’t take from Carter Park, it would give. Adding Toby’s House to the park space would bring new life and presence to a forgotten corner of the city. It wouldn’t diminish the park; it would deepen its meaning. It would offer eyes and ears on the park, creating a sense of safety and stewardship. This isn’t about losing green space, it’s about reimagining it as a place where care and play coexist. Not just a playground, but a sanctuary. A shelter for the most vulnerable among us.

And what about the neighborhood? Toby’s House wouldn’t stand in its way, it would stand in service to it. It would revitalize a neglected block, through compassion. Through care. Through presence. Some might ask, Why Toby’s House? Why this one organization? Why not do this for everyone? And that’s a wonderful question, one I wish we could answer with a resounding: We are.

Many years ago, there was an agreement to use a city park for a Boys and Girls Clubhouse, which never got the funding for a new construction at that time. Perhaps Toby’s House is a great trial for us as a city, to demonstrate the partnership that can

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

benefit and enhance our parks, our park programming, and reduce the burden on the city services.

I wish every child, every family, had access to the kind of care Toby's House provides. But part of why we are here is because Toby's House has earned this moment. It has been a quiet force for good, recognized as Montana's Nonprofit of the Year, and modeled as a pilot program for expansion in Missoula, contracted with Montana's Zero to Five after seeing the impact of Toby's House on infants, toddlers, and families. The state is supportive of innovative approaches and sustainable solutions across the state, and a creative partnership could be a feather in our Great Falls cap, a chance to lead at something other than the number of deaths of children ages zero to five. Toby's House has proven, day after day, what's possible when compassion is paired with action. And because of that reputation, because of the lives already changed, a group of generous builders and developers have stepped forward, not to profit, but to believe. To invest in a safer future. The nursery has been generously supported by local people, organizations and businesses. They've offered Toby's House the chance to grow, to move from helping eight families a day, five days a week, to eighteen families a day, 24/7. To not only protect children, but to walk alongside parents, offering them the tools, the support, and the grace to become the best versions of themselves.

And this expanded capacity doesn't just help the families who walk through the doors of Toby's House, it helps the entire city. It prevents child abuse before it starts. It helps parents keep their jobs, maintain their sobriety, and stay on stable footing. In a small but meaningful way, it eases the burden on our already overstretched police force and child protective services, agencies doing their best to serve a population that has outgrown their resources. Toby's House doesn't replace those systems, but we try to give them breathing room. It offers upstream care, quietly, effectively, and with lasting impact.

A partnership with Toby's House will increase utilization of Carter Park, bringing the target populations of families with toddlers and infants and their vitality, to spark joy in an often overlooked and underutilized green space. Toby's House over time will funnel the power of its volunteers, donors, employees and families, social media, and enthusiasm to enhance the park's features and future plans, will ensure that more trees, more benches, more facilities aligned with the city, neighborhood council & park board's strategic plans to add to and increase the usage of the park, host family-friendly events, and to partner for what dreams may come. The return for the city on sharing roughly 6% of this green space could be incredible and could be designated a pilot project on reducing burdens on the city. And best of all, it costs the city nothing to build it."

JOURNAL OF COMMISSON WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

Ms. Ford provided and discussed a scaled drawing of Carter Park. Carter Park is approximately 4.2 acres, and she is asking for 10,000 to 11,000 square feet inside the park, which is less than 6% of that park space.

Mayor Reeves inquired if the project was approved would Toby's House have a fence around the property.

Ms. Ford responded it would have a secured playground inside for when staff are working with children who are vulnerable and cannot be outside of the park. It would have a fenced area in the back and the parking lot would be open for staff use.

Commissioner Wolff inquired if Toby's House would be responsible for maintenance of the grounds and if there would be more childcare services.

Ms. Ford responded that if there is a long-term lease, the liability on that site would be Toby's House to hold and is covered under its childcare insurance. It is a likely possibility that there would be more childcare services.

Commissioner Wilson explained that the 11,000 square feet being proposed would be approximately 11% of the park, because the park is 110,000 square feet.

Ms. Ford responded that it is her understanding that the park is approximately 4.2 acres, the building itself is approximately 5,000 to 6,000 square feet and the 11,000 is inclusive of the playground.

Commissioner Wilson expressed concern that it would be taking up a lot of green space.

Ms. Ford commented that it is considered a moderate use park, and the city could help decide where to put the building in an area in the park where the park is less used or impacted. Her hope is to continue to add services, programing, and people to the park.

Commissioner Tryon commented that Toby's House Crisis Nursery is a huge asset to the community. Referring to an email from Interim Park and Recreation Director Jessica Compton about concerns from the Park Board, Commissioner Tryon requested that it be sent to Ms. Ford so she could answer those questions before proceeding with the request.

He inquired if donated private property has been considered and if Ms. Ford is requesting to lease the property from the city for a minimal amount or if the city just gives the land in Carter Park. He is concerned about the precedent it would set to proceed with this kind of arrangement.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSON WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

Ms. Ford responded that she has approached several property owners, and her preference would be a long-term lease at a nominal cost. If Toby's House were to outgrow the facility or relocate, it would become part of the City's assets. This is an opportunity for the city to consider it a pilot project and use that to formulate what the community wants as the guidelines for that.

Commissioner Tryon commented that there are 57 parks in the city, and it is worth considering other uses for these parks.

Mayor Reeves concurred with Commissioner Tryon. He added that Toby's House is invaluable, what the community needs, and he wants to see this move forward.

Commissioner McKenney commented that Toby's House is an asset to the community; however, he believes there needs to be a plan in place first because of the precedent this would set. He suggested exploring Toby's House request and expanding it to include other community needs.

Commissioner Wolff inquired about the financing and funding of this project.

Jim Filipowicz, Steel Etc President, commented that he and his wife are willing to put in a half million plus.

Scott Dunbar, Walsh Construction Company Senior Project Manager, commented that he is with a large construction company working at Malmstrom Air Force Base. This community has been good to his company, and they saw this need and want to fulfill this need. Most of the funding will be through donations from construction partners and vendors his company regularly uses that provide them with materials and equipment for their normal construction. The big limitation is businesses set business plans, and those plans include benevolent giving on a fiscal year. He is concerned that time is of the essence and if we do not move forward and commit this money, businesses are going to commit it to somewhere else or some other need and it will go away. If there are going to be studies and protracted processes to make this happen, the money will go away.

Commissioner Wolff commented that the need is much larger than many people want to acknowledge and this should move forward. There would still be plenty of room at Carter Park for the neighborhood children and there are other parks that could be used for future things. This would be the beginning of something that could really help the community.

Mr. Filipowicz commented that if the city is concerned about setting a precedent about donating property, he would buy the property and donate it to Toby's House.

Commissioner Tryon responded that selling city parks is a convoluted and long process and a lease agreement is the best way to get this done quickly.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION

August 19, 2025

City Manager Doyon commented that the city code relating to the sale, trade or lease of park property is cumbersome. It calls for obtaining an appraisal on the property and indicates that the sale, trade or lease of real property must be made to the highest responsible bidder. That is a process that needs to be overcome, and he is not sure that there is flexibility to do that unless there is only one responsible bidder. He wants to ensure that the city does this right, so other community groups do not become enraged that the city is not following the process.

If the Commission is interested in exploring this opportunity with Toby's House, he will work with the Legal Department to outline the next steps and put a timeline to it and meet with Park and Recreation to determine what the impact would be for utilizing Carter Park.

Commissioner McKenney commented that making an individual decision about Toby's House might not be the right thing to do. The city needs to make a policy about possible uses of parks and undeveloped land and what the city would consider.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he does not believe there is anything in the current policy that precludes the city from considering options like this. The Park Masterplan is a policy that is already in place that states that the city can entertain working with non-profits.

It was the consensus of the Commission that Manager Doyon start working with legal and explore options to present back to the Commission.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about the timeline for the money.

Mr. Dunbar responded that he believed the monies must be committed by December 31 tax year.

Commissioner Wilson commented that although she is not happy about losing a big portion of green space at Carter Park, she agreed to have Manager Doyon explore options.

Mr. Filipowicz commented that if this project moves forward, he will donate the playground for the park.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that there were no topics for the September 2, 2025 work session.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSON WORK SESSION
August 19, 2025

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of August 19, 2025 at 6:49 p.m.