

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
September 2, 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 Deputy City Manager Bryan Lockerby, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry, Police Captain Brian Black, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ben Forsyth, City resident, referred to a prior meeting and opined that Commissioner Tryon supports recreational marijuana in ways that are harmful to the health, safety and welfare of the people in violation of laws. His concern is that lives may be on the line.

Richard Irving, City resident, feels strongly that a library that is part of a non-partisan city government should be politically neutral. Mr. Irving expressed disappointment with the City Commission's reappointment of a Library Board member who was supported by Library management. He expressed concern that, at the last Library Board meeting, the Library Director and a contractor revealed the Library renovation plan, which was very different from the one previously proposed by a previous contractor with public input. His prediction is that five years from the start of this planned construction, practically no one over age six or under 80 will be interested in entering the Library, except for occasionally picking up or dropping off books. That is every non-research library's problem in the digital age. The Great Falls Public Library is amplifying it by planning to turn an underused library into an expensive mausoleum for books and plaques honoring donors.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. UPDATE ON CLEAN INDOOR AIR ACT.

City-County Health Department Tobacco Education Specialist Penny Paul reported that Montana has taken a significant step to protect public health with the passage of Senate Bill 390, which expands the Montana Clean Indoor Air Act to include e-cigarettes (vapes). This critical legislation closes a gap in the 20-year-old law,

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ensuring Montanans will be protected from exposure to e-cigarette aerosol in indoor public places and workplaces. The bill was signed by Governor Gianforte on May 8, 2025, and became effective immediately.

The new law prohibits smoking or vaping nicotine, marijuana, or any other substance in workplaces or indoor public places.

When signage is available from the State, there will be a press release, PSAs, and information on social media. The free signage will be available at tobaccofree.mt.gov, the City-County Health Department, Great Falls Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Great Falls Association, and Alliance for Youth.

Individuals can report violations on-line at tobaccofree.mt.gov and Ms. Paul will receive the information and handle the complaint.

2. PROCESS FOR THE SALE OF COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTER AT 801 2ND AVENUE NORTH.

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that the City is in receipt of an appraisal for the DeMolay Memorial Building (old Community Recreation Center). He discussed City Code pertaining to the sale of city property. The City is entitled to sell, trade, or lease real property without a vote of the electors when passed by 4 out of 5 Commission members. Before the final decision, the City must hold a public hearing after proper notification. The City is required to obtain an appraisal of the subject property, and the property must be offered to the highest responsible bidder with a few exceptions. There are advertisement requirements that the City must follow, and the Commission could require a development proposal for the sale. He would not recommend requiring a development proposal because of the unique layout of the building.

Mayor Reeves inquired the difference between a request for bids versus having a realtor list the property for sale.

Manager Doyon responded that there is a cost to having a realtor list the property; however, they may have better access to promoting it on the market.

Commissioner McKenney added that, because the City has an attorney on staff, the sale of property by the City, or for sale by owner, would not be in danger of running into legal complications.

Commissioner Tryon asked for clarification about the sale of real property being made to the highest bidder.

Manager Doyon responded that he would work with the City Attorney about clarifying the bidding process language in the City Code. The invitation for bids will

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set forth the appraisal price - minimum bid price, understanding that the City may need to exercise some flexibility if no credible bids are received for that facility.

Commissioner Wolff inquired if the invitation for bids could specify what the building could or could not be used for.

Manager Doyon responded that City Code states that the City may require a development proposal for the sale, transfer or lease of property which may include but not be limited to designation of a specific use or other conditions established by the City Commission.

City Attorney David Dennis added that language would have to be included in the invitation to bid, and the price would still have to be in excess of the appraised value.

It was the consensus of the Commission that City Manager Doyon proceed with issuing an Invitation for Bids with a minimum bid price of \$800,000.

Manager Doyon noted that staff will explore the best options, and issue an invitation to bid with a minimum bid price of \$800,000 at this point based on the appraisal.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENT REVIEW MEMO DISCUSSION.

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that the origin of his April 24, 2025 memorandum to the Commission was to determine what other communities are doing, to explore community questions, frustrations, challenges and opportunities that surrounded economic development and infrastructure investment. He also wanted to provide a comprehensive summary of the economic development tools that the City currently has under state law to help facilitate development and growth.

Manager Doyon reviewed and discussed his memorandum included in the packet. Factors impacting economic development and community growth included the following:

- The City is overreliant on the “Big 3”: military, agriculture, and medical community. The City should continue to support the military missions but at the same time attract other industries and businesses into the community.
- Overall growth has remained stagnant despite an increase in the population.
- There are limited housing options, primarily with multi-family projects.
- Great Falls lacks the geographic and demographic advantages of other cities, and its socioeconomics reduce outside investor appeal.

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- Some businesses have located in the County to avoid hooking up to city infrastructure and utilities and to avoid paying city taxes and assessments.
- Most recent developments have been locally driven and often require financial tools to become financially viable.
- Developers lack capital to upgrade infrastructure, such as water, sewer, storm drain, and streets.
- The City collaborates with GFDA for development promotion and had financially supported GFDA over the years. The City had elected officials on GFDA's board for a period of time, The development promoter became the developer and the City was brought into new development conversations later in the process, which changed the relationship between the City and GFDA.
- The community has a strong desire to have certain national chain stores or businesses; however, some of the City's sites may not fit their corporate criteria. The public often expresses a desire to not increase taxes, assessments, and utility rates that could help new developments.

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry commented that he is an award winner of the GFDA Ally Award, and this topic is not born out of frustration with GFDA or that the City cannot work together with GFDA. It is an opportunity to reflect is the way the City is participating too passive for the moment at hand. City employees are fiduciaries to the public's trust. This means when it comes to economic development, not only is the City looking at the new taxable value that will be added, but also the new capital infrastructure burden that will be taken upon the City.

Development is a math problem. Discussing not having enough public safety is frustrating because we need to understand that the way the City is developing will never make financial sense. Math alone shouldn't dictate why certain decisions are made. But, we know infrastructure is the biggest cost issue. What we don't do right now is project new taxable value from certain development to get an idea of the burden that the City will need to meet in the future. The State Legislature should make cities understand the capital investment required with new developments.

He is happy that there is an entire agency dedicated to economic development in the community. He has also seen the detrimental effects of being a passive participant versus being an active participant. He doesn't think the City is moving as agile as partners need the City to move. The City keeps on running into the same bottlenecks that he believes could be fixed, but would require some fundamental reorganization of how the City confronts economic development and also community development.

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He know the Great Falls' growth pace needs to improve. He has worries if the City doesn't see significant growth particularly with housing and developing more industry. He is afraid that the property tax burden will price out Great Falls identity as a community.

Director Cherry concluded that he hopes the Commission will look into this and take it very seriously because he believes the right people are at the table that could take steps toward participating in a more effective way.

Public Works Director Chris Gaub added that he looks at rate payers as investors when using their money on infrastructure projects. It is important to know what the life cycle cost would be, determine the net present value and whether the revenue proceeds from the housing development would pay for itself. Often the answer is no. He agrees with Director Cherry that it is not a pure math problem. It comes down to who pays for those utilities and streets. There is a good team at the table that are looking for a way forward to grow Great Falls in the way its citizens and political leadership wants to.

Mayor Reeves inquired about the status of a Strategic Development Officer (SDO). He added that it is time for the City to do things differently.

Manager Doyon responded that there is a funding mechanism in place; however, the Commission would need to support what he is proposing in order for that person to be effective in that role.

Referring to the "Big 3", Commissioner Wolff commented that she does not want to leave out Calumet or Montana Renewables. She recognized that there has been tremendous investment that needs to be recognized.

Referring to the strong towns concept, Commissioner Tryon commented that people think big development will be an asset for the community; however, it is a long-term liability because it does not pay for itself.

Director Cherry responded that the City is not involved early on in conversations about new development. What may sound really good and check all the boxes for GFDA, the Airport, or for jobs or housing, because they are not a fiduciary for the City the other boxes of how to pay for something long term, those conversations aren't happening. or determining how big development will pay for itself long-term. What may sound good to some may not be a sound fiduciary decision for the City.

Commissioner Tryon concurred with Mayor Reeves that it is time for the City to do things differently because the City has been having these discussions about how it needs to manage growth and development for 20 years. He added that the City has the right people in place now and encouraged changing things up.

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Commissioner Wilson expressed support of a Strategic Development Officer because that person would be an expeditor and make things work.

Commissioner McKenney commented that “business friendly” may not be the right term because business friendly is service related and the City is here to serve. The City needs to receive information about new development sooner because the Commission could make short-term decisions that have long-term impacts. He inquired how to get to the tip of the spear and still have confidentiality.

Manager Doyon responded that this position would be a very nuanced role and requires someone diplomatic and tactful. Their role would be to protect the City and that position would be housed in his office because he would need that accountability if they were going to be advocating and working at that level with our economic partners. He is cautious about putting someone in this position where they would have to sign non-disclosure agreements because it may breed the perception that the City has someone making deals ahead of time and he wants to avoid those types of ethical issues. The person in this position would have awareness of the development review process and what the City can and cannot do.

Planning and Community Development Director Cherry added that assigning these duties to someone who acts in a role of facilitation could create public perception issues.

City Manager Doyon continued to discuss his memorandum that included the following:

- Structural Challenges to Economic Development.
- Misconception about “business friendly”.
- Development Process Limitations.
- Economic Development Tools Analysis and Recommendations, Pros and Cons: Tax Increment Financing (TIF); Impact Fees; Grants; Special Improvement Districts (SIDS); Negotiated Recovery Rate for New Development; Private Development Pays for Infrastructure.
- Pros and Cons of Market-Driven Development.
- Options to Explore.
- Create Strategic Development Officer Position.
- Endorse/Adopt Development Process Guidance.

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- Commission Discussion Questions.
- Final Thoughts.

Mayor Reeves inquired if there was Commission consensus for hiring a Strategic Development Officer.

Manager Doyon responded that there is currently a draft job description; however, the question is how to fund it. There are requirements on new TIF statutes to have some coordination, and an advisory group with our TIF districts. This person would oversee that process and be partially funded by the administrative cost out of the five TIF districts, as well as utility funds, potentially.

Commissioner McKenney suggested that Manager Doyon provide the Commission with detailed information about how the SDO position would be funded.

Commissioner Wolff agreed that detailed information should be provided to the Commission as soon as possible. She expressed appreciation to Finance Director Melissa Kinzler for looking at the fiscal end of things long-term and keeping the City fiscally where it is.

Commissioner Tryon commented that Manager Doyon's memorandum is excellent and should be a template moving forward.

It was the consensus of the Commission that City Manager Doyon provide the Commission with detailed information about a Strategic Development Officer position.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the peak population in Great Falls was approximately 60,000 and dropped to approximately 50,000. Now the population is back up to approximately 60,000 and the City's growth is more robust than what people think. The Commission is excited about doing things differently.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that a Cascade County Metro Region Governance Committee for Opioid Abatement and possible follow up on this memorandum will be topics for the September 16, 2025, work session.

He expressed kudos to Planning and Community Development Director Cherry and Public Works Director Gaub for their efforts with the memorandum.

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ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of September 2, 2025 at 6:58 p.m.