

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
September 16, 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, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Written comment was received from **Terry Bjork**, (via September 15, 2025 email), urged the Commission to reject the idea of funding new non-utility positions from utility enterprise funds with regard to agenda item 2.

Jake Lapke, Missoula resident, representing the Office of Court Administrator Montana Supreme Court, reported that treatment courts are in a state of peril. They are facing financial funding cuts due to uncertainty on the federal level and rely on other funding sources to fund existing projects and projects going forward. Mr. Lapke explained that the epidemic of crime and addiction has affected communities. Treatment courts are one tool that addresses crime and addiction within our communities. Supporting the MOAT applications within this community will directly benefit the reduction of recidivism and interdiction of addiction. Investment within our treatment court system provides judicial oversight, testing, supervision, treatment and accountability to the participants as opposed to Department of Corrections placement. He would appreciate consideration of the two applications that would directly support the ongoing work that the two courts do in this community.

Ben Forsyth, City resident, commented that he respects the City Commission; however, he is concerned that during a public meeting, Commissioner Tryon defended marijuana use by many citizens and two weeks ago he spoke about his perfect record. Mr. Forsyth expressed concern that Commissioner Tryon does not understand the deep concerns that are creating harms in the City. He commented that the Police Chief had indicated that violent felonies increased 84% in one year in this community related to drug harms and the Sheriff indicated that violent felony records increased 176% in seven years. Mr. Forsyth further commented that marijuana is the most commonly used drug and used more than all other illegal drugs

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combined. There are methods of legalizing marijuana that he has provided the Commission copies of in the past. His goal is to legalize cannabis ruderalis or ultra-low marijuana that does not create the harms. He encouraged the Commission to think in terms of the law that specifically allows passing marijuana regulations that control marijuana to prevent the harms that he discusses.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. CASCADE COUNTY METRO REGION GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE FOR OPIOID ABATEMENT.

City Attorney David Dennis explained that in order to establish a governance structure for the opioid abatement monies going to the Metro Region, the City needs to enter into an Interlocal Agreement with the County. The City Commission had expressed concerns on a couple of different points; however, since then, City staff have addressed those concerns.

Retained Attorney Ben Snipes reported that there has been a series of developments with regard to the opioid settlements and the accumulation of a substantial amount of money. The proposed Interlocal Agreement between the City and County is unique compared to any other agreement that is sitting with the Montana Opioid Abatement Trust in Montana.

The City, along with a handful of other political subdivisions, brought claims on behalf of their communities to address opioid public nuisances created by manufacturers and distributors. More opioids hit the market than necessary, mostly precipitated by Purdue Pharma, which took bankruptcy protections; however, City Manager Doyon recently signed a settlement agreement with Purdue Pharma and other smaller manufacturers and distributors.

Litigation and monies continue to mount through the City's effort. The funds are being paid out over the course of several years through most of these settlements. The State allocation is approximately 15% and MOAT allocation is approximately 70%. As of today, there is \$1,238,000 in funding awaiting distribution out of Cascade County Metro Region, which consists of the City and Cascade County.

The proposed interlocal agreement establishes governance structure that combines the City, which includes Commissioners Rick Tryon and Shannon Wilson, and Finance Director Melissa Kinzler and the Board of Cascade County Commissioners as a global governing body. Built within the structure of the agreement includes separate abilities to fund projects without dissipating the funds of the whole. There were some key provisions in the agreement that were changed including provision four, Authority and Responsibilities, stating that the entities can jointly fund opioid abatement projects. In the case of jointly submitted applications, the opioid

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governing body can facilitate how they want to spend the money, or they can elect to fund opioid abatement projects jointly, if mutually agreed upon by both parties. There is approximately 53% or \$653,000 allocation for the City for opioid abatement projects and 47% allocation for the County.

Provision six, Individual Applications, states that the County or City may independently fund opioid abatement projects using its individual allocation. Whether it is the City or County, it only utilizes the remaining funds that are specifically allocated to the City or County.

Mr. Snipes concluded that the County Commission has approved the amendments in the Interlocal Agreement.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the Interlocal Agreement will be an agenda item at the October 7, 2025 City Commission meeting.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that 66.4% of the MOAT is available for regional and state projects and within the 66.4%, there are allocations specific to the Cascade County Metro Region. The Global governing committee is the County and City and that entity is responsible for the allocation of the MOAT money specifically designated for Cascade County Metro Region. Another pot of money is within the purview of the local governing committee and does not involve any coordination or input from the County Commissioners or vice versa.

Mr. Snipes added that the City, through Resolution 10577, designated Melissa Kinzler and Commissioners Rick Tryon and Shannon Wilson as the administrative agents responsible for opioid remediation. It is up to the City to decide how to spend money specifically allocated for the City. There is a global component for MOAT money, and it is used for jointly funded projects.

Mayor Reeves inquired if the City and County could fund a project together through the local government fund allocation.

Mr. Snipes responded that it could do so to the extent those funds exist; however, it would make sense to use MOAT funds for jointly funded projects.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that two separate applications for two separate treatment courts are potentially in the MOAT process. A point person needs to be established through the administrative body to help applicants determine which fund to apply to.

City Manager Greg Doyon further responded that the City's Grant Administrator could potentially be a point person. A process needs to be lined out and a clear break-out of the two available funds. The money the City has still has to meet some criteria and will require working with legal to come up with an application.

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Commissioner McKenney received clarification that the three funds include the City, County and MOAT. Cascade County or the City may also independently fund opioid abatement projects using its individual allocation, provided such funding does not reduce or otherwise affect the funds allocated to the other Party's individual allocation or the Metro Region Funds, unless expressly agreed upon by both parties. All of the money spent and allocated out of the MOAT comes in response to approved applications that are coming through the MOAT.

Commissioner Wilson received clarification that the fund is currently at \$1,238,000 and there is more coming. Montana should be getting about \$6 million a year for the next two years, which means approximately \$500,000 allocated to the Cascade County and City of Great Falls Metro Region.

It was the consensus of the Commission to move this forward for the October 7, 2025 City Commission meeting.

**2. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENT REVIEW
CONTINUED FROM SEPTEMBER 2, 2025 WORK SESSION.**

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that community development was one of the Commission's priorities. Specifically, to continue strengthening the relationships with the City, GFDA and the Chamber, as well as continue working with Planning and Community Development to streamline processes and eliminate any barriers to development in Great Falls. Staff are looking for opportunities to facilitate and foster economic development in the community and continue working on the improvements that have already been made with development review.

His April Memorandum had specific recommendations which included exploring additional City funding options for public infrastructure investment, establishing a Strategic Development Officer (SDO) position, finalizing updated special improvement district policy, and having the Commission adopt and endorse clear development process guidance for staff and developers. Approximately \$2 million was targeted for water, sewer, and storm drain to help make sure infrastructure is not a barrier to growth.

Another goal of the Commission was housing. To meet that goal, it would be good to have a source that is going to be mutually beneficial that helps the City meet the objective of having new industry, homes and maintaining its infrastructure.

At the September 2, 2025 Work Session, the Commission broadly supported the idea of exploring a SDO position. The SDO would serve as the City's lead representative for coordinating economic development initiatives, managing public-private partnerships, and overseeing key infrastructure financing tools, such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Special Improvement Districts (SIDs). The SDO would maintain

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relationships with the Great Falls Development Alliance (GFDA) and other partners in the community. Reporting to the City Manager's Office, the SDO is the primary point of contact for developers and business stakeholders, guiding projects through early planning stages and ensuring alignment with City policies, funding capacities, and infrastructure priorities.

Mayor Reeves inquired if Finance Grant Administrator Tom Hazen, with ARPA winding down, would oversee the TIF Districts.

Manager Doyon responded that Finance primarily oversees TIF Districts; however, with the requirement of having an advisory board, it would take more coordination, and he would rather have Grant Administrator Hazen focusing on grants.

Manager Doyon further reported that this role is grounded in the ethical stewardship of public resources and responsible for advocating fair, transparent, and financially responsible development practices. The SDO leads cross-departmental coordination, advises the City Manager and Commission on growth strategies, and maintains trusted relationships with economic development partners and the public.

The SDO must have a strong understanding of municipal finance, land use, and infrastructure policy, combined with diplomacy, integrity, and strategic focus. The primary benefit of creating this position is to professionalize and modernize the City's development posture, provide early engagement, disciplined use of financial tools, and transparent negotiation. Ultimately making Great Falls more resilient, competitive, and fiscally sustainable in how it manages growth. One of the most important parts of this is getting in early when there is a prospect and the prospect needs to have information about what the City can and cannot do with infrastructure upfront. Manager Doyon clarified that the proposed position would not replace GFDA, rather, it would help compliment the work GFDA is doing.

The proposed position benefits include centralized leadership for economic development. The SDO would provide a dedicated, consistent point of contact for developers, investors, and economic partners, rather than ad hoc, and often delayed involvement of the City Manager, Public Works, Planning, and Finance directors. This improves coordination and reduces mixed signals, which currently creates perceptions that Great Falls is not "business friendly" and that development processes are too complicated, burdensome, and uncoordinated.

Stronger management of financial tools (TIFs and SIDs). The City's TIF districts, SID's expansions and the new Strategic Capital Improvement Fund are complex and politically sensitive and require specialized oversight and compliance management. The SDO position would help reduce workload in both Finance and Planning and Community Development.

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The SDO would ensure these funding tools are applied consistently, transparently, and strategically, protecting taxpayer interests while maximizing public value. Developers often approach the City late in the process. At that point, their expectations are high, but staff's influence is limited and creates conflict that can escalate publicly, to economic development organizations, and ultimately to the Commission. The SDO would act as the "tip of the spear", engaging developers early, aligning expectations with City capacity, and preventing friction at the Commission hearing stage.

Improved Infrastructure Financing and Cost Recovery. The SDO would bring expertise in fiscal impact modeling, revenue projections, and scenario planning. This allows the City to negotiate infrastructure contributions, structure financing agreements, and align growth with long-term financial sustainability, reducing the strain on the General Fund and existing ratepayers.

Balanced advocacy and public trust. The role advocates for economic growth while safeguarding community standards such as infrastructure capacity, regulatory compliance, design standards, zoning, and growth policy compliance. By being transparent about what the City can and cannot do, the SDO would help bridge public expectations with developer demands, maintaining credibility and fairness.

Capacity building and internal efficiency. The position would relieve executive leadership, City Manager and department directors, from direct negotiating roles, freeing them to focus on higher-level policy and operations. The SDO would also serve as an "internal translator/coordinator," aligning Finance, Public Works, Legal, and Planning around development priorities and ensuring unified messaging.

Strategic partnerships and representation. The SDO would strengthen relationships with GFDA, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Great Falls Association, BID/TBID, and state/federal partners. This coordinated advocacy increases Great Falls' competitiveness for investment and grants while keeping the City, not outside entities, as the primary voice for community interests.

The proposed position challenges included wages and benefit cost. Reliance on sensitive, non-General Fund funding sources.

Resident, business confusion about role. It may be seen as overlapping with GFDA and the Chamber. The position requires a highly ethical person, and this could be seen as additional bureaucracy or favoritism toward developers.

The position would not have actual authority to make promises required for development infrastructure without board and commission approval and must guard against promising more than the City can deliver.

Uncertain ROI. Market conditions may limit measurable wins.

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Political exposure. Positioned squarely in high-profile growth debates.

Alternative models beyond the creation of a new position include structural alternatives such as reassigning or reconfiguring existing staff or shared staff with GFDA, Chamber or BID.

Hybrid options included piloting the project for a period, “Assistant” or “Assistant to” or “Deputy City Manager”, with development emphasis.

Manager Doyon concluded that the City has tried many approaches over the years to energize economic development that included the following: Consolidated Planning and the Community Development Departments into one department; Relocated a Development Engineer to Planning from Public Works; Created TIFs; Expanded uses and definitions; Direct payments to GFDA; Moderate infrastructure investments; annexed parcels; completed studies; adopted strategies and plans; and financed debt. These efforts have not delivered the results the community wants and expects.

The position being considered is part of an overall strategy to change how the staff and elected officials move the City forward with its economic development efforts. The City needs to be more proactive when it comes to economic development.

Mayor Reeves expressed support of the SDO position; however, he is concerned about the funding mechanism for the position. He suggested looking at and cleaning up the non-performing funds. Mayor Reeves inquired how NDAs would work for a City Government Employee.

Manager Doyon responded that he would not want to put an employee in a position where they would have to sign an NDA. He would rather have that employee utilize the relationship and information with discernment and good judgement.

Commissioner Wolff commented that there were several edits she would like to suggest to the SDO job description; however, she would go over that later. She suggested that the Airport Authority Board and Military be added to this. She commented that she supports the SDO position and that it would be beneficial to have a point person for the City.

Commissioner Tryon expressed support of the SDO position; however, he is concerned about the funding mechanism that is suggested for the new position. The SDO position would need to have measurable results in economic development. He inquired about other models that other communities have used. He suggested having another work session for further discussion.

Commissioner Wilson expressed support of this position; however, she is concerned that \$120,000 may not be enough to get the right person.

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Commissioner McKenney commented that this should not be rushed into and more work sessions may be needed because he still has several questions. He inquired what the difference is with this position as far as trying to get the development community to come to the City at the beginning, because it has been saying that for years.

Mayor Reeves suggested that each Commissioner sends Manager Doyon their own individual questions and concerns prior to the next time this topic is addressed.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that an MDT Central MT Transportation Study, a Great Falls Voyagers stadium funding request for repairs and Library Foundation's fundraising plan will be topics for the October 7, 2025 work session.

Commissioner Wolff requested that an annual update from the Airport Authority Board be a topic for an upcoming work session.

It was the consensus of the Commission that Manager Doyon schedule a special work session to continue discussions about the SDO position.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of September 16, 2025 at 6:50 p.m.