

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**November 18, 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 Jeremy Jones, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Acting Fire Chief Mike McIntosh and Assistant Chief of Operations Jeremy Virts, Park and Recreation Interim Director Jessica Compton and Park Manager Kevin Vining, Public Works Director Chris Gaub, City Engineer Jesse Patton, Street and Traffic Manager Eric Boyd, Utilities System Manager Jake McKenna and Civil Engineer John Perrodin, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Richard Irving**, City resident, opined that the Great Falls Public Library is a playground for the rich, famous or well-connected and not for the public. Mr. Irving commented that he attended interviews with candidates for the library and most of them had erratic work histories. He expressed concern with regard to the two remaining candidates not expressing any enthusiasm or attempting to make the library work better, as well as the number of unhoused people in the library. Mr. Irving urged the Commission to take a close look at the library remodel plans very carefully.

**WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. UPDATE FROM HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION ON THE BOSTON AND MONTANA BARN**

Richard Ecke reported that he is a member of the city-county Historic Preservation Commission and chairman of the commission's Save the Barn Committee. Since Great Falls was founded in 1884, its largest employer through the 1930s was a smelter in Black Eagle built by the Boston & Montana Co., and later owned by the Anaconda Copper Mining (ACM) Co. This industrial behemoth wired the world with copper wire and other products that helped the Allies win both World Wars and employed thousands of area residents. The ACM smelter closed in 1980, and its owner tore down all buildings dating back to the original smelter but one. The one

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still standing is the Boston & Montana mule barn, erected in 1901 to house horses, mules and equipment. This building is unique, and very much worth saving and stabilizing. The Montana Historic Preservation Office has said the barn would probably be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The city of Great Falls became owner of the barn in the 1980s, when Arco donated the Anaconda Hills golf course to the city, and included ownership of the barn in the donation. Which brings us to today, when the barn is in rough shape but still stands. The city faces a choice: stabilize the barn using private donations and grants raised by volunteers; or destroy the barn and possibly use tens of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money to level it.

The committee has submitted to the commission a report dated November 12 estimating the costs to stabilize the barn at \$175,000. The committee began fundraising efforts several months ago and so far, has raised nearly \$30,000 in cash and pledges. The committee informed the Park and Recreation staff that the Preservation Commission is willing to pay to install stronger fencing on two sides of the barn to replace flimsy temporary fencing installed by the city. The committee believes this project can be accomplished by initially installing better fencing to keep people off the site and reduce the city's concerns about liability. Then it plans to ask city staff to obtain bids from contractors over the winter months, solicited in two parts. The first part would be to stabilize the barn's walls; the second would be to rebuild the barn's roof, which is in poor condition. Many of the timbers supporting the roof can be salvaged and used to help rebuild the barn's second story and roof.

The barn committee has a technical adviser, former private construction official Dan Johnstone, who is advising the committee on what will be needed to stabilize the barn. The committee is also awaiting an additional report from its architect about the barn's condition. The committee believes this is an opportunity for the city to give preservationists more time to continue fundraising and save a precious slice of Great Falls' past. Tourism is enhanced by an area's unique history. Let's not forget the Electric City's amazing industrial past. Eventually, the committee would love to see the barn become an interpretive center and an events center. Mr. Ecke requested that the Commission give the committee time to raise additional dollars and choose stabilization over destruction.

Commissioner Wolff expressed concern about the amount of money being raised would not be enough to totally renovate the barn, the liability for the city and contaminated soil around the barn.

Mr. Ecke responded that it is his understanding that the soil around the barn has not been remediated. Lead contamination can be an issue; however, covering the top of the soil with sod helps reduce the pollution for an industrial site. In the 1980's the EPA told Arco to take care of the pollution and provide it with a report on how it was done. In the intervening years, the EPA said those efforts may not have been

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sufficient and that is why it is a superfund site. Superfund has possibly been helpful to the barn because the County's Masterplan for that area included the Boston and Montana Barn as a potential interpretive center. Being a superfund site may enable the Boston and Montana Barn to receive money down the road for renovation. For now, the committee is just trying to keep the barn upright by stabilizing it.

Commissioner McKenney expressed support of saving the barn if the liability, safety and secure fencing issues are taken care of, because private sector money would be used and the barn has historic significance.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that currently there is a 10-foot fence with barbed wire on top that goes around the outside of the golf course, an original smelter fence that connects to the golf course fence, two sides have temporary fencing, and the west side has a snow fence. Vandals entered through the north edge fence and spraypainted inside the barn. The Park and Recreation Department's recommendation of an eight-foot-high chain link fence with barb wire on top for the west and north sides, was not included in the \$175,000 stabilization cost. The committee would like to seek bids over the winter and begin the stabilization process in March; however, if the barn collapses over the winter, the matter is moot. If the stabilization phase is allowed, the intent from the committee would be to create a 501(c)(3) and it would be up to that nonprofit to renovate and insure it. If the barn were stabilized and renovated into a visitor center, the public would be able to access it through county owned property.

Commissioner Wilson received clarification that the county has been supportive and approved the inclusion of the building as a potential interpretive center and access to the barn.

Mr. Ecke added that the county does not have funds to help; however, the committee intends to pursue a \$15,000 grant from the Foundation for Montana History. The committee is also in contact with the owner of the adjacent property and would like to bring Northwest Energy into this because of the hydro-electric power in that area.

Commissioner Wilson inquired if the committee has spoken with anyone dealing with the superfund site because it is an operable groundwater unit.

Mr. Ecke responded that the committee had attended some of the meetings in Blackeagle and their focus is on what they are doing now. However, if it can continue to raise money, it could raise money for that as well. The committee has raised \$28,645 to date and started approximately four months ago.

Commissioner McKenney mentioned that the committee has raised approximately \$30,000 so far and secure fencing would be approximately \$30,000. The preservation group raised \$20,000 to have a study done to determine whether the barn could be

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saved and the architectural study indicated that the barn could be saved. The money is available now to do the fencing, which would take care of the city's safety and liability concerns if the commission gives approval to do that. The committee would have the winter and spring to raise more money to complete the other stages.

Commissioner McKenney expressed support of allowing the committee to move forward if the safety and liability concerns are addressed.

Mr. Ecke responded that if the city decides to have the barn torn down, the committee would rather see the money used for stabilization rather than demolition. The committee is not asking the city for any money and wants to raise all the money privately.

City Manager commented that the absolute minimum would be to have the site secured.

Park Manager Kevin Vining reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included: photos dated April 12, 2023 – November 14, 2025.

Park Manager Vining reported that the barn has been monitored for the past few years, and the concern is the exponential rate of structural failure. The integrity of the structure has gone from approximately 40 percent in 2023 to an estimated 10 to 15 percent. The costs brought forward tonight excluded repairs needed for a collapsed roof on the north end of the barn. There were previous stabilization efforts done; however, with the collapse of the roof and twisting of the frame, there is not much preventing the building from collapsing. Staff's biggest concern is the liability and condition of the building. The costs would be much more to attempt to get it into a stable position and the building is in active failure.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that if the west and north side fencing were replaced with an eight-foot fence, there would be 100 percent enclosure of the barn. Certain access points would need to be negotiated because of leased property.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the stabilization process of the barn would not have any interference with golf operations.

Mayor Reeves inquired if the committee is prepared to spend the \$30,000 for secure fencing, knowing the barn could collapse over the winter.

Mr. Ecke responded that the committee is prepared to spend the \$30,000 and will talk with donors to make sure they will be okay with that because some of them said they want their money returned if the building cannot be saved.

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Commissioner Wolff inquired if the materials could be saved to build a monument, if the building were to collapse.

Mr. Ecke responded that there are four other options that are in the report that was provided in the agenda packet to the commission. The committee's focus is to raise money for stabilization. The committee has considered doing a virtual study of the inside and outside of the barn; however, it is expensive and the committee would rather use the money to stabilize the barn.

Park Manager Vining commented that the City Commission was approached in 2005 about this project and given the progress made to preserve it, City staff is concerned about the cost, and he presumes there might be asbestos in the building.

Mayor Reeves explained that he cannot support this project moving forward because of the liability to the city.

Commissioner Tryon commented that the only way he could support moving forward is if the city donated the barn and a small parcel of the property around the barn to a nonprofit, so any liability would be on the non-profit.

City Manager Doyon explained that City staff would need to look at the deed before considering donating to a nonprofit.

Commissioner Wolff suggested waiting because City staff have not investigated this and provided the Commission with that information.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission to have City staff explore protecting the site, look at the deed and consider other options, and report back to the Commission at the next work session.

## **2. FIRE TRAINING CENTER UPDATE**

Deputy City Manager Jeremy Jones reported that the Fire Training Center has been on the City's Capital Improvement Plan for decades. It was tentatively scheduled to be replaced in 2009. With the failure of the last prop a year ago, GFFR has had the inability to train to the two standards the fire department is measured by, Insurance Services Office (ISO) and National Fire Protection Association. It has impacted GFFR by its inability to train new recruits and at the modern standard to ensure that GFFR firefighters are able to respond to the needs of the community.

Fire Assistant Chief of Operations Jeremy Virts, Public Works Director Chris Gaub, Street and Traffic Manager Eric Boyd, Utilities System Manager Jake McKenna, and City Engineer Jesse Patton reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included:

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- How We Got Here:
  - Facility failed after years of deferred maintenance.
  - Pavement not constructed for fire truck weight.
  - Facility capability does not match current firefighting training means:
    - No ability to train to ISO specifications and NFPA standards.
  - Commission approved loan 4/15/2025 – other financial options explored:
    - Budget (not supportable)
    - Grant funding (not applicable)
    - Through legislative pathways (unsuccessful)
- Where We're at:
  - Engineering preparing request for bid for tower structure.
  - Fence contract awarded (Interap Loan \$).
  - Engineering the site:
    - Grading, utilities, storm pond, concrete and asphalt work, stormwater improvement plan and permit; water main/hydrant.
- Where We're going:
  - Real life training venue – streets, avenues, hydrants, draft pond.
  - MT's 1<sup>st</sup> burn building of this nature – mutual aide: invite others.
  - Interdepartment effort: one team – GFFR, PW, Finance, PCD, IT, Attorney, PD.
  - Select tower contractor
  - Compete design, obtain permits, demolition, construction, possible rendering (actual rendering depends on final contract selection)
- Training Tower Capabilities:
  - 4-5 stories in height

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- Highrise/standpipe training to simulate apartments and commercial structures
- Aerial apparatus training (operations from GFFR tower and ladder trucks)
- 4-5 burn cells (real fire rooms for heat and limited visibility training)
- High angle technical rescue (rappelling into confined spaces or over buildings)
- Movable interior walls to change interior layouts for trapped victim rescue
- Roof ventilation prop that allows for multiple pitch degrees
- Site Plan (Concept)
- Public Works - Benefits:
  - Public Works – South Complex
  - Time/cost savings; training
  - Example: street sweeping:
    - 25% time savings for mobilization
    - 13 hours saved, to reallocate to other priorities
      - Dominoes = getting to a mill and overlay job one day earlier = one more block paved per season
  - Similar for paving, plowing, snow/ice removal, gravel surface maintenance, pothole repair, etc.
  - Training: Operators (street, utilities); hydrant flushing
  - Long Term: CDL Course
- Cost Breakdown (estimated)
  - \$2.5M direct budget (GFFR loan)
    - \$65K: Demolition of existing tower (complete)
    - \$1.2M: New Fire Training Tower Building

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- \$12K: Geotech report (in progress)
- \$20K: Engineering (City)
- \$50K: Fence
- \$564K: Groundwork, Asphalt, Concrete
- \$10K: Additional Connex Box
- \$150K: Concrete Pad (60x80)
- \$150K: Water Main
- \$50K: Storm Pond
- \$15K: Building Permit
- \$2,290,479
- Alternates (If funding available)
  - \$200K: Concrete Apron in front of tower
  - \$25K: Landscaping
  - \$5K: Sign
  - \$5K: Security cameras
- Project Timeline

## **DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS**

Due to the lack of time, topics for upcoming work sessions were not discussed.

## **ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of November 18, 2025 at 6:49 p.m.