

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
December 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 Jeremy Jones, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry and Deputy Director Lonnie Hill, Library Director Susie McIntyre, Acting Fire Chief Jeremy Virts, Police Captain Doug Mahlum, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. LIBRARY ANNUAL UPDATE

Library Board Chair Anne Bulger explained that the 2025 Annual Report covers the period of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Highlights included the following: information on projects supported by the library foundation; new and improved services; lessons learned; areas for improvement; youth services, programing and services; summer reading programs; community engagement activities; digital resources; general statistics; library remodel design work; and overview of the library's financials.

Commissioner Wolff expressed appreciation to the library for its online E-Books and Audiobooks, as well as the Homebound program.

Library Director Susie McIntyre explained that the library provides services to seven senior living facilities and has special events with the bookmobile. Fewer elderly people need Homebound services and have been checking out books electronically because they can choose a font for easier reading.

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Library Board Chair Bulger added that the elderly also love the option for audiobooks through MontanaLibrary2Go.

Commissioner Tryon commented that a constituent informed him that they would not take their kids to the library because of the homeless and transient people outside the library. He inquired about how the library deals with homelessness, trespassing people and whether a rumor he heard is true about the needle exchange program from several years ago being implemented again at the library. He further inquired if the amount between the library's total revenue and expenses is carried over to the next fiscal year.

Library Director McIntyre responded that, as a governmental agency, the library has a duty to serve everyone in the community and cannot discriminate based on age, sex, religion, gender or housing status. The library focuses on behavior and is doing everything it can to make people feel safer coming to the library, including having a safety specialist do more patrols. Downtown has a problem with substance abuse, mental health issues and homelessness. Any community problem like that will surface in a public area and is not a problem the library can solve because it must follow the law.

The library enforces the Patron Behavior Policy as fairly and consistently as possible. The library can trespass people when behaviors rise to the level of egregiousness and it also has a Trespass Committee.

The needle exchange program is not being considered. Several groups, such as Alluvion Health, Little Shell Tribe and Alliance for Youth table in the library to provide information; however, they are not allowed to do any needle exchange. There is a sharps container in the staff area at the library to dispose of needles found at the library.

The amount between the library's total revenue and expenses stays in the library fund. The revenue was more than the expenses because the library froze hiring for new positions because of the City/Library Management Agreement negotiations in FY25. Some money was put into the reserve account for the air handler and the money that was not used for that stays in the library fund for deferred maintenance.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about the hires that the library held off on.

Library Director McIntosh responded that some positions were eliminated and the library will be recruiting for the others.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about the positions the library would be recruiting for.

Library Director McIntosh responded that full-time Information Technology and Clerk positions were eliminated. It was decided not to fill the Assistant Library

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Director position until the new library director starts on January 5, 2026. Library Director McIntosh mentioned that her last day is December 27, 2025.

Library Board Chair Bulger added that she spoke with the Human Resources Director, and she verified that the transition period until the new library director starts would be fine.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that the reason page 4 of the report lists Whitney Olson as Chair is because the report is for FY25, and Ms. Bulger became Chair in July 2025 and is Chair for FY26.

Mayor Reeves commented that when he receives emails from a concerned constituents about the library, he forwards them to Library Director McIntosh, and she has been outstanding responding back to them. On behalf of the Commission, he expressed appreciation to Library Director McIntosh for her 20 years of service to the library and community.

Commissioner Wolff expressed appreciation to Library Director McIntosh for working hard and becoming the library director. Commissioner Wolff added that she is thrilled that Great Falls College MSU hired Ms. McIntosh for its librarian.

Library Director McIntosh commented that it has been the honor of her life to serve the community. She gave a shout out to the library staff, board, volunteers and foundation, as well as City staff.

Commissioner Wilson congratulated the hiring committee on such an excellent prospect they are bringing on.

2. DOWNTOWN PARKING PROGRAM UPDATE

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry explained that he is going to recap and discuss the next steps about the Downtown Parking Program from the December 1, 2025 Special City Commission Meeting. Director Cherry reported that the Commission, in response to prevent the existing parking budget deficit from growing further, voted to move forward with Option 1A. Changes will include the following:

- Increase on-street curb parking rate from \$1.00 to \$1.50.
- Eliminate Courtesy Ticket - first-time violation fine - \$10.00.
- Second-time violation fines - \$5.00 to \$20.00.
- Third-time violation fines - \$10.00 to 40.00.

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- Fourth-and-subsequent violation fines - \$20.00 to \$75.00.
- Increase meter bagging fees to \$10.00 per day.
- Increase pedlet fees to \$500.00 per space per season.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that currently, the pedlet fee is \$400.00, is implemented on a seasonal basis and has not generated any complaints from other downtown businesses.

Director Cherry commented that he has heard that pedlets are well-received for downtown businesses because they keep people outside downtown and there is a public safety security piece because there are more eyes on the streets to deter undesirable behavior. The full burden cost of what a pedlet should be is \$1000 a year; however, antidotal data from the Parking Advisory Commission (PAC) indicated that the other benefits the city receives are worth it because pedlets create a vibrant downtown.

Commissioner McKenney inquired about how the timing is determined of subsequent violation fines after the first ticket. He commented that he is uncomfortable with Option 1A and the violation fines are extremely high. The sooner the city can come up with another option to adjust these types of things the better.

Director Cherry responded that he believes there will not be a restart date; however, he has heard of three different versions and will verify that information tomorrow and report back to the Commission.

Mayor Reeves concurred with Commissioner McKenney's comments, and he added that subsequent violation fines should not run forever.

Commissioner Wilson received clarification that the increase of pedlet fees to \$500.00 is per pedlet space and generally, one or two parking spaces take up a pedlet space.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that Director Cherry will check into seeing if there is something in the Passport Parking App that can be changed because it cannot be started until 9:00 a.m.

Director Cherry further reported that other changes will include the following:

- Modifying City Code with regard to booting a vehicle with five or more unpaid or delinquent tickets that are at least thirty days old. A final notice mailing would be eliminated.
- Eliminate the 15 Minute Courtesy Parking Program.

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The projected timeline to implement the resolution to increase rates, penalties, and fees, and the ordinance to amend related City code is as follows:

1. First Reading – January 6, 2026
2. Public Hearing – February 3, 2026
3. New Fee Implementation Date – March 3, 2026

As Option 1A is implemented, a long-term strategy to find better options is also going to be worked on. With greater conversation and a long-term strategy identified, an interim period is needed to implement a long-term strategy. There is going to be a period of growing pains with regard to what needs to be done until the new system is implemented.

The estimated financial impact is as follows:

- Cash 12/1/2025 (\$8,723)
- October SP Plus (\$43,500)
- November SP Plus (43,500)
- December (\$15,000)
- Free Holiday Parking (\$10,000)
- January (\$15,000)
- February (\$15,000)
- Balance at beginning of March (\$150,723)

Mayor Reeves stated that totally understanding all of this now, he would have voted differently and ended the contract at the December 1, 2025 Special City Commission Meeting. It does not make sense to continue racking up (\$150,000) when the contract could be terminated and people could park how they want for next four months until this gets figured out.

Director Cherry responded that the city must meet State requirements for noticing and when things change. The December 1, 2025 Special City Commission Meeting was official action on direction and not approving fees and there is an opportunity for greater discussion.

Commissioner Tryon suggested canceling the contract, nullifying all of this and implementing Option 3, mad max, immediately.

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Commissioner Wilson explained that regardless of which way the city goes, it still owes SP Plus \$87,500 for October and November.

Commissioner Wolff commented that she believes there is a 60-day notice for cancelling the contract with SP Plus. She inquired if the \$15,000 instead of \$43,500 for December, January and February is because there would be more revenue coming in from the increased fees.

Finance Director Melissa Kinzler responded that there is a lag-time from incoming revenue to when the city receives invoices from SP Plus and the revenue has already been spent, but the expenses must be paid for SP Plus. She clarified that the estimated financial impact amounts were estimates.

Mayor Reeves inquired what the main difference was between Option 3 and Option 4.

Commissioner McKenney responded that Option 4 is a longer-term, total reset of parking, and makes downtown more friendly. There would be free on street parking, two-hour courtesy time limits, enforcement would be determined, paid parking in the garages and surface lots and incentivizes the garages by including the downtown merchants.

Commissioner Wolff explained that there were several conversations after the December 1, 2025 Special City Commission Meeting from people of the downtown business area. A concern was how someone with mobility issues would get from the parking garage in snow and ice to where they want to go downtown. Parking garages will require new technology and having someone in the garage. She summarized that the parking garages could be incentivized; however, people are not going to park there if they must walk a distance to get to where they want to go.

Commissioner Tryon explained that the Commission would have to vote to terminate the contract with SP Plus by February 30 because of the 60-day notice, if April 30 is the plan and it would be summer before the contract would be cancelled. He suggested going half mad max and having a vote on canceling the SP Plus contract at the end of February.

City Manager Greg Doyon explained that even if the mad max route is decided upon, the parking system would still need to be maintained and regulated to operate in a safe and efficient manner. The most important part of this is that the Commission is clear about the program's expectations before having conversations with downtown business owners and users of the system. Those involved in the long-term strategy conversations will need to understand why the general fund cannot continue to support parking and the challenges of operating a system that offers different levels of service.

Director Cherry reported that program expectations included the following:

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- The program must be financially self-sustaining.
- Turnover must support business activity.
- Enforcement must be consistent, predictable, and fair.
- Parking assets must be maintained to a safe, functional standard.

All recommendations must be data-driven and consider the following:

- Existing garage and lot finances.
- Market-rate comparisons.
- Enforcement levels and revenue impacts.
- Utilization data (block-by-block, time-of-day).
- Capital maintenance obligations.

Required elements of the April 30 recommendation included the following:

- Enforcement model (hours, staffing, consistency).
- Rate structure (on-street, off-street, garages).
- Capital and operating funding plan.
- Technology and payment system recommendations.
- Customer experience and communication plan.
- Proposed implementation timeline (18-24 months).

Director Cherry explained that whatever plan is decided on in April will not go into effect immediately. Part of the conversations that will need to happen with the downtown businesses is funding sources. TIF funds can be used for equipment, technology and infrastructure; however, to make things work, the city would probably be expending a lot of that money. Staff are already planning a framework for beginning these conversations in January.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the number of employees at SP Plus has already been cut in half and is currently at a minimum; however, staff could provide the Commission with information regarding what cutting that even more would look like.

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Manager Doyon inquired if there is anything missing regarding the program expectations.

Mayor Reeves responded that two years is too long for a proposed implementation time.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the program must be financially self-sustaining, that is not an option. The legislature put local government on a starvation diet 26 years ago. This program is for the merchants and they want turnover, so the city must work with them to find a way to make it self-sustaining. He believes the implementation could be sooner than two years.

Commissioner Wolff explained that if it is decided on to not charge for on-street parking and instead encourage people to use the garages, TIF funds or alternative sources of money will be needed to pay for the technology required to manage that system. Even with those investments, some personnel costs might be reduced, but the reality is that without proper enforcement and collections, none of this will work.

Commissioner Tryon commented that a fundamental factor is that downtown businesses want timed parking but do not want to pay for it and customers that shop downtown do not want to pay for anything. The city has no obligation to provide parking enforcement for downtown businesses, and he would like to see the city totally out of the parking enforcement business. The city is obligated to provide public safety and infrastructure. Downtown parking has been a long-going issue, and two years is a totally unacceptable timeline for implementation. He would rather shut everything down after the new year until this gets figured out and he intends to stick to the vote at the December 1, 2025 Special City Commission meeting to have an operational plan put before the Commission for consideration by April 30, 2026.

Mayor Reeves inquired if there are private entities that run parking in Montana.

Director Cherry responded there are private entities in Montana, but how those experts are identified is part of the larger, strategic conversation. Where things get elongated is not necessarily what the strategy is for two years, it is the implementation of the equipment and public spending. Staff will continue preparing documents that support Option 1A, with the understanding that the Commission can decide not to do that.

Commissioner Wolff received clarification that SP Plus has never indicated that it wants to take over everything and have the city out of it.

Commissioner Wilson commented that regardless, the city still owes SP Plus \$150,723 at the beginning of March 2026 for past expenses.

It was the consensus of the Commission that City staff continue with Option 1A.

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Commissioner Tryon inquired if the city could assess the downtown area to pay for parking enforcement.

Manager Doyon responded that a Special Improvement District would need to be created; however, that process would be considerable.

Finance Director Kinzler added that the assessing process would be similar to the Park Maintenance District.

Manager Doyon mentioned that Deputy City Manager Jeremy Jones indicated to him that there are three meetings currently set up to start conversations with the stakeholders.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that there will be no formal work session on December 16, 2025 and there will be an open house for the Great Falls Elected Officials and Swearing in Ceremonies starting at 5:00 p.m. A Growth Policy update will be a topic for the January 6, 2026 work session.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of December 2, 2025 at 6:41 p.m.