

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS**  
**July 29, 2025 -- Special City Commission Meeting**  
**Civic Center Commission Chambers, Room 206 -- Mayor Reeves Presiding**

**CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**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, Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Police Captain Doug Otto, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:**

There were no proposed changes to the agenda by the City Manager or City Commission. The Commission approved the agenda as presented.

**CONFLICT DISCLOSURE/EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:**

None.

**PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

1. **Ben Forsyth**, City resident, commented that he considers the July 1, 2025, work session minutes incomplete because they do not reflect all his statements regarding marijuana, as well as Commissioner Tryon's comments regarding same. He suggested the recording be referred to and all his comments be added to the minutes, stating that the only way the Commission will ever completely understand the tremendously complicated situation is to begin to read some of the documents he has provided. He requested the Commission set a time, date and place to have a discussion between the supporters of marijuana and the people who find harms in marijuana.

**Ron Paulick**, City resident, referred to a Neighborhood Council 4 issue pertaining to a vacant lot on 57<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, and complimented City staff and the property owner for taking care of the complaint. The property now looks like a nice place to develop some housing.

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## ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS

### **2. RESOLUTION 10596: A RESOLUTION REFERRING ORDINANCE 3278, AN ORDINANCE AMENDING TITLE 9, CHAPTER 9, SECTION 030, OF THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS TO RESTRICT PERMISSIBLE FIREWORKS FOR SALE AND DISCHARGE, TO A VOTE OF THE PEOPLE AT AN ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 4, 2025.**

City Attorney David Dennis reported that the City of Great Falls has a long and storied history with regulation and deregulation of fireworks. Most recently in 2021, the State of Montana removed the restriction on aerial fireworks from its statute regulating fireworks. At the time, the City's fireworks ordinance referred to the State statute as to what was allowed or not allowed. At the time that the State removed that restriction, then those aerial fireworks that were previously restricted under State law were no longer restricted under State law or under local law.

Recently, the City Commission has received significant input from community members regarding the sale and use of fireworks within incorporated city limits. Many residents have voiced support for restricting these types of fireworks, citing concerns related to public safety, fire hazards, noise disturbances, and negative impacts on Veterans, pets and other vulnerable populations. These individuals urged the City to adopt stricter local regulations beyond those permitted under State law to address these concerns. Conversely, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members who wished to preserve the ability to sell, purchase, or use fireworks as currently allowed under State law. These residents emphasize personal freedom, traditional celebration, and economic considerations in their comments.

The Commission has held two different work sessions to discuss the potential regulation of fireworks. At the first work session, the Commission directed staff to provide ordinance draft options for regulating fireworks. At the second work session on July 29 [*sic*] July 22, 2025, staff presented those options, and the Commission directed staff to present the resolution and ordinance that is provided here today.

The City Commission has the authority to refer policy questions to the city electorate by ballot issue and has indicated to staff that it would like to place the issue on the November 4, 2025, general election ballot.

Under Montana law, the Commission may refer a proposed amendment to a City ordinance to a vote of the people. Resolution 3278 [*sic*] 10596, as presented, will officially refer the question to the electors on the November ballot. Resolution 3278 [*sic*] 10596 refers the form of ballot as stated in the agenda report in detail to the voters at the November 4, 2025, general election.

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**Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission set a public hearing to consider Resolution 10596 for August 5, 2025.**

Mayor Reeves asked if there were any comments from the public.

**Paul Lloyd Davies**, City resident, commented his preference is to ban all fireworks. This town looks like Fallujah in the week to two weeks leading up to July 4th. In addition to the reasons that were addressed by the City Attorney, he cited environmental concerns. Fire wasn't the only concern when the National Park Service did an environmental assessment and examined resuming fireworks displays at Mount Rushmore, South Dakota. The trash left behind by exploded fireworks, including paper and cardboard, and even unexploded shells were found to harm the memorial's aesthetics and pollute the nearby water supplies, groundwater, and surface waters. He discussed a 2016 U.S. Geological Survey study that found that several chemicals in fireworks, most prominently perchlorate, had leached into Mount Rushmore's groundwater, and when ingested at high levels has been known to affect human thyroid function.

Mr. Davies suggested, instead of impugning the character of a dead woman, he would hope that the fireworks industry in this town would come forward with a \$100,000 reward for the arrest and conviction of the people whose acts led to the death of that woman.

He concluded that, while it may be a nice step to put this on the ballot, he believes that the only direction to go is a total ban on the fireworks.

**Jeff Thill**, City resident, commented that in 2021 the State did not just allow aerial fireworks, it was changed so bottle rockets and roman candles were allowed in 2021. Artillery shells and everything aerial before that were allowed. He worked with former Mayor Winters to change City Code from five days to three days and added fines. The biggest problem was that the police couldn't differentiate between what was aerial or not. He reiterated that this isn't something that has been going on for a short period of time – artillery shells and similar fireworks were legal for many, many years.

**Ross Coons**, City resident, shared personal information why he supports the ban on fireworks in the City. While growing up in Havre he was subjected to his house being set on fire by a stray firework. It was an incredibly terrifying experience. In addition to the stress that it causes him hearing fireworks go off over his house even these days, dogs and Veterans are affected by fireworks. He has lived in cities where fireworks were not allowed. City displays were put on for the public. That would be an admirable compromise so that there is a contained area for people to choose whether to participate or stay in their own home and not have to experience fireworks for the better part of a week. He urged the Commission's support for a ban on fireworks in the City.

**Britta Oliverson**, TNT Fireworks, Cardwell, MT, commented that she empathizes with those who have had tragic events related to fireworks. She also strongly empathized with families who have been affected by drunk driving, by texting and driving, and by accidents

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caused by careless people who are not following the law. Unfortunately, when laws are put in place, that doesn't necessarily mean that people are going to follow them.

She suggested the Commission take more of a proactive approach to educate people on the safety of proper use and disposal of fireworks. She provided the Commission with an email this morning containing numerous links on how other states and cities have approached this. Rather than standing here year after year debating the problem of fireworks, she suggested being proactive and doing something to address it.

In talking with cities across the state who have banned fireworks, she knows banning is not going to work. People are going to continue to set off fireworks, just as they continue to text and drive or drive intoxicated. There is not a law that the Commission can make that is going to help people have common sense and have people automatically follow the law.

She commented that "we can't assume common sense," and that is why we need to educate. The materials she has at her disposal could help Great Falls be a flagstaff city to start showing the cities around the state how to promote safety rather than just continue to restrict or ban. Colorado has a program of fireworks safety starting in the fifth grade that she helped put together. The programs talk about the bucket brigade and fireworks safety. She taught fifth grade for 20 years, and fifth graders have an influence on their parents.

She concluded that, by using the tools that we have, it can limit more accidents through education and through being proactive rather than reactive.

**Melodee Scott**, City resident, commented that she is deeply concerned about the current situation with fireworks in our city.

She agrees with the comment made earlier about the importance of education. But, she also thinks that when dealing with individuals who enjoy the artillery explosions and the thrill of it all, she is not sure education is enough.

She is in support of banning fireworks within the City limits. She has looked into what other larger cities in Montana have done and banning has worked. It is the first step in getting people's attention. A ban would also support our police department. Officers could make better use of their time than trying to respond to fireworks calls.

She continued that where she lives in Eagles Crossing, it sounds like a war zone. One of her neighbors set off fireworks in the middle of the roadway. Her house collected debris and she was afraid of a fire. She also fears for pets and Veterans.

She concluded that she doesn't think restrictions will work. She suggested organized shows at the fairgrounds or parks, and banning fireworks within the City limits for the safety of people, property, and pets.

**Dick Scott**, City resident, commented that he and his wife lived in Great Falls from 2000 to 2005 when there were strict bans on fireworks. Fireworks were allowed at the baseball park and the fairgrounds, and maybe for New Year's Eve. He thinks that is enough.

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He personally witnessed pre-teenage children lighting good sized firecrackers and throwing them under an RV parked in front of his house. That was a dangerous situation that could have caused some problems.

As a Veteran, he feels that the celebration should be something that is more easily regulated, like in a park, baseball diamond, or isolated area. The supervision would be better organized with professionals doing it. The educational policies mentioned are fantastic. He thinks the kids will get it, but some of the parents never grow up and won't get it. He is in support of banning fireworks, or isolating fireworks for professionals in well-restricted and disciplined areas.

He ends up cleaning his yard for at least three months after the holiday from remnants coming down his rain gutters off his roof. The morning after this 4<sup>th</sup> of July, he used his blower to blow about 25 pounds of debris back onto the neighbor's driveway to get it off his driveway and off the middle of the street.

Written public comments were submitted by:

**Bob Brown**, City resident, commented that fireworks, except for sparklers, novelty snaps, poppers, bang snaps, and throwdowns, should be banned by the City.

**Jeni Dodd**, City resident, commented she does not understand why any Commissioner would deny the people a vote on this issue, especially since the cost of adding it to the ballot is negligible.

**Terry Bjork**, City resident, commented that fireworks restriction option #3 is never going to pass in Great Falls as it is far too expansive with its inclusion of plain old firecrackers and anything that explodes. He suggested there should be a much more well-considered option that addresses limits with a smaller scope. He asked the Commission to take a second look and craft some custom proposal for an option #4.

**Britta Oliverson**, TNT Fireworks, suggested partnering with the Bucket Brigade and Cascade County to do a robust safety and education campaign, and she provided links to social media safety materials and sample education messaging.

Mayor Reeves asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners.

Commissioner McKenney commented that he heard City Attorney Dennis paint this issue as the citizens who want a fireworks ban versus businesses that sell fireworks. As he listens to community comments, there are plenty of citizens that still want fireworks.

Commissioner Tryon and Mayor Reeves noted that they heard City Attorney Dennis say there were citizens on both sides of the issue.

City Attorney Dennis responded that his role isn't to paint it either way. He tried to describe the discussions as he had heard them.

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Commissioner Wolff thanked the person for bringing up the point of education. Somebody made the comment that we can't legislate common sense, no matter what we would do. There are several of us who have had experiences with fireworks causing or potentially causing damage to our homes.

With regard to the proposal language on page 2 of 3 of the agenda packet, she inquired if the words "mortars and grenades" should be added to the prohibited fireworks. She noted there is a black market that sells those items.

Her concern is that no matter what the Commission does tonight, next week, or if it goes to the election, there will still be those fireworks going off and it will still be a burden on the Police and Fire departments. She stands by her original statement that the woman who lost her life deserves more and she deserves better. She didn't ask to die a horrible death in her own home.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he appreciated the email about the safety and education measures. Whether the voters decide they want to go with an ordinance that restricts fireworks or whether they vote to keep it the way it is, the City will have to do more to educate the public on fireworks laws and enforce existing or future ordinances. He understands the argument that people will continue to do whatever they want even if the voters approve the proposed fireworks ordinance. He doesn't agree with the argument that people will break the rules anyway as a reason not to act. He understands there is a lack of public safety resources. But, he doesn't buy the argument that restrictions do nothing at all. He believes that restrictions in other cities have worked. The voters are smart enough to know that this isn't just something that you flip a switch, pass an ordinance, and all fireworks stop in city limits.

Referencing a Montana Free Press article, he quoted:

- Bozeman Police Chief Jim Veltkamp told Great Falls officials in an email that fireworks calls have gone down a bit and that the city is still working to educate residents about a relatively new rule. Bozeman banned fireworks in 2023.
- Bozeman Fire Chief Josh Waldo said that they anticipated a transition period while people get used to the change. He said that the department is more focused on letting people know about the fireworks ban rather than pursuing tickets. When you start down this path, please do not think that you're going to pass this ordinance and flip a switch, Waldo said. It's going to take time. He said the use of fireworks has decreased in the city anecdotally, but it hasn't ceased.

One challenge that the Commission will have if this goes on a ballot is educating the public, so they understand that this is not flipping a switch. People need to be well educated about what this vote does and does not mean.

Commissioner Tryon noted that the Commission is not making a decision tonight on banning or not banning fireworks. Tonight is first reading that would set the resolution

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and ordinance language for a public hearing on August 5<sup>th</sup> regarding whether or not to send it to the ballot on November 4<sup>th</sup> for the people of this community to decide.

He believes the proposed ballot language is straight forward the way it is phrased. The more items that are included about what is permitted and not permitted the harder it gets for people to go through it and make a decision. This November is the best time to decide this issue because it is the most cost-effective time - only \$88 for the City to place it on the ballot. A special election would cost \$30,000–\$40,000. Waiting until next November (with federal and state races/issues) would create a more confusing ballot and cost more.

He concluded that this process is not rushed, but rather meeting a necessary 85-day deadline for ballot placement.

He asked if City Attorney Dennis wanted to respond to the commenter that took exception to his comments about the 2021 state ban on aeriels no longer being in effect.

City Attorney Dennis clarified that the language of the State statute prohibited skyrockets, which was not defined, roman candles, bottle rockets and maybe one other thing. Although he knows these things have very specific definitions under federal or other laws, he interpreted them to mean something that goes up in the air and explodes.

Commissioner Tryon inquired if it was correct that prior to 2021, skyrockets and those other things were prohibited in the City because the City defaulted to State regulations.

City Attorney Dennis responded that the City law was changed in 2007. Prior to 2007, the City had a very elaborate regulatory structure for fireworks that was too cumbersome, because it was very specific and detailed as to all the different types of fireworks and what people could and couldn't do. To simplify it, the Commission at the time referred to what was allowed under State law.

Commissioner Tryon reiterated that when state law changed, by default City restrictions and regulations changed.

Commissioner Wilson commented that she doesn't believe hand grenades and mortars are allowed to be shot off in the City.

City Attorney Dennis responded that hand grenades are not considered consumer fireworks and, therefore, would not be allowed under state law.

She thinks education on fireworks safety also needs to be stronger for ground fireworks, noting when she was a kid a neighbor set their house on fire using ground fireworks in a garage with flammable items. She doesn't think fireworks safety covers rockets that go up in the air and land on other people's property. There is nothing that makes that safe.

It is going to be hard to ban fireworks totally. She hears a lot from people that this issue needs to go on the ballot and they are happy with a restriction.

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Mayor Reeves prefers not to have the Commission go down this path. He would prefer stronger enforcement and do the educational component. He also believes that this community is torn on this topic, and he wants it to go to the will of the people and he will respect whatever they decide.

He thinks there will be significant challenges because there are county parcels located within the city limits. If a ban does occur, people will just go to that county parcel to get their fireworks.

Frankly, if the Commission legislated this issue, he would not vote in favor of a ban on fireworks. He would want the Commission to focus more on education and enforcement of the rules that are currently on the books.

Commissioner McKenney commented that, because this is first reading, he will save most of his comments for the public hearing when a decision will be made. He pointed out that he opposes an ordinance banning fireworks, he opposes putting this issue on the ballot, and he will speak more about his reasoning at the August 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves asked the City Clerk to remind the Commission of the motion.

City Clerk Lisa Kunz recalled that Commissioner Wilson moved, seconded by Commissioner Tryon, that the City Commission set a public hearing to consider Resolution 10596 for August 5, 2025.

Mayor Reeves called for the vote.

Motion carried 3-2 (Commissioners McKenney and Wolff dissenting).

## ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission, **Commissioner Tryon moved, seconded by Mayor Reeves, to adjourn the special meeting of July 29, 2025, at 6:20 p.m.**

Motion carried 5-0.

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Mayor Cory Reeves

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City Clerk Lisa Kunz

**Minutes Approved: August 5, 2025**