

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
May 1, 2012

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Winters presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: City Commissioners present: Michael J. Winters, Fred Burow, Mary Jolley, and Robert Jones. Commissioner Bronson was excused.

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager; Deputy City Manager; Directors of Fiscal Services, Planning and Community Development, and Public Works; Police Chief; and the Administrative Secretary.

1. BUILDING COALITION GROUP

Building Coalition Group (BCG) representative Rick Tryon introduced Great Falls Association of Realtors Executive Officer Terry Thompson, Great Falls Homebuilders Association Executive Officer Katie Hanning, and Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Officer Steve Malicott. Other BCG members include Rickey Linafelter with the Great Falls Landlords Association, and Gary Sorum with Great Falls Income Property Managers and Owners.

Mr. Tryon provided a PowerPoint presentation and explained the purpose of BCG is to work with the City to change the perception that Great Falls is not a business or development friendly place. BCG has identified 13 recommendations and would like to present four of those recommendations at a City Commission meeting in the near future for public comment and a vote.

Ms. Thompson reviewed four current City Commission goals and excerpts from a memo from City Manager Greg Doyon to the City Commission dated December 14, 2011 to validate the BCG's support and offer some solutions.

Ms. Hanning reported BCG wants Great Falls to become the most business and development friendly city in the state. BCG is requesting the Planning and Community Development Department make a greater effort to find a solution when a project doesn't meet code.

Mr. Tryon noted the Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA), the Great Falls Homebuilders Association, the Great Falls Association of Realtors, the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, and others are all stakeholders in development for Great Falls and Cascade County.

Mr. Malicott believes that with good partnerships, the City can become the most business and development friendly city in the State of Montana.

Ms. Thompson reported Recommendation 1, to establish a publicly stated goal, mission, and vision that Great Falls will be proactive in becoming the most business and development friendly city in the state, can be achieved by adding it to the City Commission Vision/Goals.

Recommendation 2, that all levels of staff in the Planning and Community Development Department will strive to implement a “we are here to serve you, how can we help you get your project done” attitude, may be achieved by creating a catch phrase that would be posted in the Department for staff and the public to see and printed on documents such as applications, permits, etc.

Mr. Tryon suggested a mission statement be created that Great Falls will be the most business friendly, development friendly city in the state.

Mr. Tryon reported Recommendation 3 is to eliminate the Design Review Board (DRB). Community aesthetics may be addressed in another way.

Commissioner Jolley expressed concern that the DRB considers buildings in relation to others nearby. She believes business owners do not want to blend in with other businesses. She also questioned the DRB appeal process.

Planning and Community Development Director Mike Haynes responded the DRB can only make recommendations for improving a project.

Commissioner Burow noted applicants are subject to the opinion of another person, rather than written requirements.

Mr. Tryon believes that anyone who would purchase property for a business would want to make the property look as nice as they can afford.

Mr. Tryon expressed concern with potential conflict of interest with members of the DRB.

Mr. Tryon reported Recommendation 4 is to create a Development Process Advisory Review Board (DPARB), similar to Billings.

Ms. Thompson discussed the Billings DPARB which was created as a buffer for their City Administrator, staff, and building professionals. DPARB allows the community to file appeals.

Mr. Tryon discussed the purpose of the Billings DPARB.

Ms. Hanning discussed the proposed Great Falls DPARB.

Mayor Winters expressed concern there would be another layer of people determining what could be done on a business owner’s property.

Mr. Tryon responded the purpose of the DPARB is to act as a mediator and facilitator between the development community and the Planning and Community Development Department to address issues as they arise before they become problems.

Ms. Hanning believes the DPARB would provide a huge education component.

Ms. Thompson noted the DPARB would help communicate the facts to the public.

Mr. Malicott commented the DPARB would formalize all the processes into one board that would discuss issues and recommendations, and the builder would have opportunity to present complaints without fear of retribution.

Mr. Haynes stated there is currently a Board of Adjustment/Appeals, however, he noted no objections to the proposed DPARB.

Mr. Tryon suggested some members to be appointed by the City to the DPARB, and some members selected by the development community.

Commissioner Burow questioned the need for the DRB.

Mayor Winters stated the Commission would review and discuss the proposed DPARB.

Mr. Malicott commented the efforts of the BCG are to be partners to work toward a common goal.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the informal work session of May 1, 2012, at 6:38 p.m.