

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
June 17, 2014

City Commission Work Session
Civic Center, Commission Chambers

Mayor Winters presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: City Commissioners present: Michael J. Winters, Bill Bronson, Fred Burow, and Bob Jones. Commissioner Bob Kelly was excused.

STAFF PRESENT: Deputy City Manager; City Attorney; Directors of Fiscal Services and Public Works; Police Chief; Interim Director of Park and Recreation; and the Deputy City Clerk.

**** Action Minutes of the Great Falls City Commission. Please refer to the audio/video recording of this meeting for additional detail. ****

1. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

2. VISITOR CENTER PRESENTATION

Deputy City Manager Jennifer Reichelt provided and discussed a PowerPoint presentation update of the Visitor Center. She also provided and discussed a handout of the Visitor Center Lease Agreement.

Ms. Reichelt introduced key players that helped develop a transition plan for the Visitor Center: Great Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) Executive Director Carol Lindseth, President Lara Tait, and 1st Vice President, Shane Etwiler; Great Falls Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) Administrative & Marketing Director Karen Venetz and Board Member Robert Dompier; and Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA) President and CEO Brett Doney. She also recognized Devin Hartley of the CVB for his essential key role in the transition plan.

Visitor Center Update & Lease Overview



June 17, 2014

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Visitor Center Background

- In the mid 90's the Chamber proposed that if the City built a new Visitor Center, the Chamber would operate it.
- The City built the current Visitor Center in 1993 - located in Overlook Park, adjacent to Warden Park.
- The City entered into an operating agreement with the Chamber in 1993.
- Originally the Visitor Center was operated in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce.
- For 11 years, the City and Chamber shared the costs of the Visitor Center.



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Visitor Center Background

- The operating contract with the Chamber expired in 2004.
- In 2005 the City began operating the Visitor Center after the City and Chamber could not come to a mutual agreement.
- Since that time, the Visitor Center has been housed in the Park and Recreation Department .



Circa 2005

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Visitor Center Operations

- Open year round, seven days a week.
- 3 part-time staff members share two positions.
 - Two job share one position (work two weeks at a time)
 - One employee works primarily on weekends and fills in as needed
- Operating budget of just over \$60,000.
 - In the past the Convention & Visitor Bureau (CVB) has provided funding in the amount of \$12-\$16,000 a year (Bed Tax).
 - Applied for a Montana Department of Tourism Grant for FY 2015 – which will be transferred to the CVB (\$8,000).



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Visitor Center Operations

- Primarily staffed by volunteers
 - Retired Senior Volunteer Program
- Provide maps, brochures, event calendars, coupons, magazines and general information on the Great Falls area and the State of Montana.
- Sell Made in Montana merchandise & trolley tickets.
- In 2013, 13,540 guests were served from every state in the United States and over 25 foreign countries.



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Current Budget Situation

- The City's General Fund is currently being stretched very thin.
- The goal this year was to have department's focus on their core services.
- It was determined early on in the budget process that the City would no longer be able to continue to fund and operate the Visitor Center.



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<h3 style="text-align: center;">Current Budget Situation</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing the important role the Visitor Center plays in the community, staff reached out to our tourism partners to determine their interest or willingness to operate the Visitor Center. A meeting was held in March with a number of tourism partners. The CVB, GFDA and TBID all expressed interest in moving forward with discussions regarding operating the Visitor Center and developing a lease agreement.    <p style="text-align: right;">7</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Tourism Partners</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since March, City staff and representatives from the CVB, TBID and GFDA have been meeting regularly to develop a lease agreement and discuss a transition plan. The CVB, GFDA and TBID held a visioning session at the Visitor Center, have met with volunteers and had discussions regarding the future of the Visitor Center with their respective organizations.  <p style="text-align: right;">8</p>
<h3 style="text-align: center;">Tourism Partners</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CVB will be the lead agency involved in operating the Visitor Center and is the signatory on the lease. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The TBID and GFDA will assist the CVB. Their partnership and willingness to help has been truly appreciated. The goal has been to provide the CVB with a turnkey operation that is ready to go starting July 1, 2014.  <p style="text-align: right;">9</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Lease Highlights & CVB Operations</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the CVB's intent to hire a Visitor Center Manager to oversee the operations of the center. It is the CVB's and their partner's intent at the end of this year's tourism season to provide a complete facelift to the Visitor Center. The City has agreed to provide the CVB with all the furnishings, fixtures, merchandise inventory and equipment in the building as of July 1. <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>
<h3 style="text-align: center;">Lease Highlights & CVB Operations</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lease is for three years for one dollar per year. CVB is responsible for all utilities, including electricity, water, gas, or other utilities servicing the property in a timely manner. CVB will independently arrange with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program any continuation of assignment of volunteer workers in the Visitor Center building. CVB shall, throughout the term of the lease, and at its own cost and without any expense to the City, keep and maintain the leased premises, including the building and improvements. The City is responsible for the maintenance, repair and snow removal of the parking lot, sidewalks, and remaining parkland surrounding the leased premises. <p style="text-align: right;">11</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Process</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> June 17, 2014 – Set Public Hearing July 1, 2014 – Hold Public Hearing for the lease agreement July 1, 2014 – Transition to the CVB pending Commission approval  <p style="text-align: right;">12</p>

Ms. Reichelt questioned if the Commission would approve CVB opening the Visitor Center doors on July 1, 2014, if a signed agreement is in place, though the agreement would not be submitted for Commission approval until that evening. Though other options were discussed, the consensus of the Commission was to allow CVB to open the Visitor Center doors on July 1, 2014.

Ms. Reichelt noted the Lease Agreement allows the facility to be used for other Convention &

Visitors Bureau purposes, including office space.

3. DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

Deputy City Manager Jennifer Reichelt discussed upcoming work session topics including the Budget Work Session scheduled for July 1, 2014. Additional budget work sessions may be scheduled after the July 1st Work Session.

Ms. Reichelt questioned the Commission's interest in providing staff direction to schedule a work session to discuss the potential park land swap with NeighborWorks. The consensus of the Commission was to schedule a work session after budget discussions.

Mayor Winters suggested another work session on potential rail yard incidents, including emergency information for the public.

Commissioner Burow suggested a work session to discuss the problem of feral cats.

Ms. Reichelt noted other potential topics including Planning and Community Development and Fire Rescue licensing fees; Development Process Task Force; Risk Management Annual Report; Montana Defense Alliance update; Child Abuse; USAF Community Partnership Initiative (P4); and, quarterly budget updates.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the informal work session of June 17, 2014, at 5:55 p.m.