



**Great Falls Public Safety Advisory Committee Agenda  
2 Park Drive South, Great Falls, MT  
Gibson Room, Civic Center  
June 19, 2024  
6:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 5, 2024

OLD BUSINESS

2. Amend the motion passed on June 5, 2024 pertaining to acceptance of the May 15<sup>th</sup> minutes.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

3. TIF's and tax abatements follow-up
4. Public Survey/Poll follow-up
5. Discussion Questions

MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM COMMITTEE

PUBLIC COMMENT

*Public Comment on agenda items or any matter that is within the jurisdiction of the Committee. Please keep your remarks to a maximum of five (5) minutes. Speak into the microphone, and state your name and either your address or whether you are a city resident for the record.*

ADJOURNMENT

Next Scheduled meeting July 3, 2024 6:00 p.m.

**Approved during 6/5/24 PSAC Meeting**

Regular Public Safety Advisory Committee Meeting Civic Center, 2 Park Drive South,  
Gibson Room 212, Great Falls, MT 59401

**CALL TO ORDER:** PSAC Chair Sandra Guynn called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

**ROLL CALL:** Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) Members present: Jeni Dodd, Sandra Guynn, Wendy McKamey, Joe McKenney, George Nikolakakos, Mike Parcel, Thad Reiste, Tony Rosales (participated telephonically), and Shannon Wilson.

Absent: PSAC Member Aaron Weissman.

**1. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

PSAC Chair Guynn moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, that the PSAC accept the Minutes of the May 1, 2024, PSAC Meeting as presented.

PSAC Chair Guynn asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Committee. Hearing none, PSAC Chair Guynn called for the vote.

Motion carried – 9-0.

**EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**2. FOLLOW UP PRESENTATIONS FROM MUNICIPAL COURT AND LEGAL**

City Attorney David Dennis reviewed a handout setting forth crime rates by county. Cascade County has the highest crime rates over the counties of Flathead, Gallatin, Missoula, Lewis and Clark, and Yellowstone of 1100 cases per 10,000 people.

PSAC Chair Guynn received clarification that the pretrial services component of the approved County Safety Levy only benefitted Cascade County cases.

City Attorney Dennis reported that when the State court system was upgraded to a full court enterprise system, his office no longer had access to that case management system that his office had relied on. Great Falls is the only City Attorney Office in Montana that does not have a case management system. Although his office recently regained access to the State’s full court system, it would be more helpful in a lot of ways for the City Prosecutors to have their own platform. Currently, there is no way to track and sort information.

PSAC Member Reiste reported that he sat in Municipal Court two mornings and witnessed an amazing amount of work being processed without the needed software tools. It is only going to get more overwhelming as the workload and community grows. PSAC Member Wilson concurred.

PSAC Member McKenney addressed what the City means when talking about “growth” and the challenge with funding public safety. Over the last few decades, the City’s footprint has grown

approximately forty percent. In the early 1970's, a public safety bond was approved for the Fire Department. Four fire stations were built to meet the public safety needs at that time based on the footprint of the City. Also around that time, the City employed approximately 100 firefighters. Now, Great Falls Fire Rescue has approximately 70 firefighters and the City's footprint has grown since that time. The Fire Department has a national standard of a four minute response time. The Fire Department cannot meet that four minute standard on average, which means it affects life safety and property, but also insurance rates go up.

Even if the footprint of the City hasn't grown, it would still be a public safety issue because the City went from 100 firefighters down to 70. Another fire standard is having 15 firefighters on a house fire to manage it properly. Great Falls has 13 firefighters citywide on staff, three in each station and one supervisor.

It has been a 25-year challenge. In the late 1990's, one of the ways that the State Legislature wanted to solve the increase in property taxes was to cap it. It was capped at half the rate of inflation. Imagine being in business for yourself for the past 25 years and not being able to keep up with inflation. So, even without growth, we would be having this decline of being able to properly fund public safety.

City Manager Greg Doyon added that the City's coverage area has expanded. Beyond that, there are things that society faces that impact how public safety services are provided. What he has seen since he has been a City Manager in Great Falls is the scope, frequency, severity, nature, and complexity of services have changed significantly for everyone in public safety. A specific example is in the 1970's marijuana was the drug of choice. Now, it is fentanyl, which affects all EMS first responders, the Great Falls Police Department and Great Falls Fire Rescue.

Another impact is travel and tourism. The City has become a little bit of a destination or at least a stopping point to go to either of the National Parks. There has been a lot of promotion to bring people here. So, we are not just talking about serving our own residents.

Another impact is the infusion of temporary workers in the City. There was more police engagement and court activity with the influx of Calumet's temporary workers coming in from out of state.

There is also a homeless population that typically requires emergency services. There is also the transient population that comes to Great Falls for services. The availability of mental health resources has changed over the years that impacts how a first responder has to deal with somebody that has a mental health issue. First responders do not have the resources to provide to them.

In 2017 the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act definitely had an impact on courts and law enforcement.

Safety standards for first responders have also changed. There are certifications, licensures, and other things that they have to do that have changed their procedure and how they engage and provide those services.

### **3. PRESENTATION FROM POLICE**

Police Chief Jeff Newton, Great Falls Police Department (GFPD), reviewed and discussed the PowerPoint slides attached to the agenda packet. He reported that this presentation is a refresher of what GFPD was asking for in the levy and an emphasis on the challenges GFPD is experiencing right now as a law enforcement agency serving the community, and some concerns and where he thinks the City is headed. He elaborated as follows:

- GFPD has worked diligently to streamline processes and is running about as lean as it can.
- The Patrol and Investigation Bureaus are prioritizing calls.
- A Toggle report that was conducted for a three-month timeframe revealed that officers on patrol have about one hour of undedicated time during their 10 hour and 40 minute shifts. The one hour undedicated time is not continuous and is in small increments of 5 to 15 minutes. That means it reduces their ability to proactively enforce traffic stops, to respond to complaints, and it decreases high visibility patrols, fewer community and business checks, and all those things that are important to the community.
- Investigations Bureau is focusing on violent crimes and sex offenses. They even have to prioritize those offenses. The property crimes get pushed to the bottom of the pile.
- Many programs have been eliminated, including some community based programs. Staffing and resources have been put into their core functions of patrol and investigations.
- Alternative funding sources have been sought through grants. The Great Falls Police Community Foundation has been a phenomenal supporter of GFPD, which is made up of donations from the community through fundraisers to supplement budget shortfalls for needed equipment and training for officers. The Downtown Association has also helped.
- The Great Falls Police Protective Association has funded things within the Police Department and has also donated their time for events in the community.
- GFPD is currently down nine officers and down seven dispatchers. He is currently going through a hiring cycle. He is hoping to hire two lateral officers, meaning they have previous law enforcement experience and, if they are from Montana, he doesn't have to send them back through a 12-week academy. They can do initial training, and then a 14-week field training officer program.
- Data is being used to deploy resources. For example, if an area is saturated with vehicle break-ins, they will saturate that area with additional officers.
- As of Tuesday this week, GFPD averaged 114 calls for service per day, and averaged 14 officers during a 24-hour timeframe. As the weather is changing, calls for service will increase substantially. During the heat of last summer, GFPD was running anywhere from 160 to 200 calls for service per day with the same staffing levels.
- Some of the complexities of how things have changed in law enforcement include, for example, processing a DUI. Because of legislative changes, defense work, reporting requirements, etc., the average DUI investigation takes 2.25 to 3.5 hours. Because the breath test analysis instrument has been questioned, GFPD now does blood draws which adds time for search warrants. If it's a blood draw issue, or if the individual is over a 3.0 blood alcohol content (BAC), the officers have to take them to the hospital to get cleared medically before they can be incarcerated. That may add another two hours.

A DUI investigation takes a minimum of two officers. If he has seven on a squad, and just lost two for several hours, he is down to five officers. Partner Family Member Assault (PMFA) domestic violence calls take a minimum of two officers. Now he is down to three officers. If a shoplifting call comes in, he is down another officer for 45 minutes. Hopefully a major crash doesn't occur. A crash that is blocking or is an injury accident may take multiple officers to include assistance from outside agencies for public safety. The times mentioned do not include writing reports, evidence submission, and then subsequent court attendance.

- Forcible felonies consisting of aggravated assault, robbery and rape cases are starting to increase.
- The Investigations Bureau has seen a 6% increase in violent crimes, and the Special Victims Unit has seen a 6% increase in sex crimes or offenses against children. One investigator solely investigated 60 Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC)/Human Trafficking cases in 2023.
- Four school resource officers (SRO) were assigned 437 cases. The Diversion Program is running about 90%-92%. That means the SRO's work closely with the school administration. When a juvenile commits a low level offense, the SRO works with the school administration for in-house discipline, punishment, and resources to try to keep them out of the juvenile justice system. Without the diversion program, the SRO cases would be increased exponentially.
- In 2023, the Narcotics unit saw a 141% increase in fentanyl seizures and 198% increase in cocaine seizures. There was a 66% decrease in methamphetamine seizures. That does not mean that meth isn't prevalent because the more current numbers are eye popping and it is coming back in droves. It means officers are focusing their attention on the fentanyl issue. There was also a 161% increase in clandestine marijuana lab seizures.
- There have been 39 overdoses, three of which were fatal, so far in 2024. Eighteen times officers have deployed Naloxone or Narcan to reverse the effects of opioid overdoses.
- Assaults on officers has increased by 21% over the last year.

Chief Newton reported his concerns include:

- Staffing levels of both sworn officers and at the 911 Center – recruitment and retention and career vs job. The disturbing part about that is it is tremendously expensive and takes about 371 days to get an officer from the recruitment process of hiring until they are solo patrol out of field training. It takes about 120 days just to do the hiring process.
- Level of aggression/violence is increasing with community members.
- Significant increase in narcotics in our community.
- Injuries to officers.
- Prioritization of calls – both at patrol and investigations. GFPD wants to respond to the community's concerns, but simply cannot do it with the resources and capacity that it has.
- Budgets/resources – costs continue to increase and are passed on to the GFPD. Equipment, software and warranties are more expensive.
- Legislative – changes in the legal landscape, and unfunded mandates. Manager Doyon mentioned the 2017 legislative changes. He thinks one of the reasons shoplifting has skyrocketed is because, if it is a first offense misdemeanor theft, people get a ticket rather

than jail time. Somebody could steal \$1,499 worth of items, and GFPD has to write them a ticket and let them go. The legislative changes that took people out of the Department of Corrections and back into community based programs created more work for law enforcement, EMS, and the court system. For example, last year the officer involved shootings and the homicides that occurred, with one exception of the tragic homicide/suicide on West Hill Drive, involved individuals either on probation or parole. That is a reflection of those individuals being pushed from the Department of Corrections down to the overworked Probation and Parole Officers. There is a cascading effect with all of that.

Looking into the future, workloads are not decreasing. Calls for service were 5% higher in 2023 than they were in 2022, and staffing levels are not increasing. GFPD continues to streamline processes that are allowable by law and by policies. Manager Doyon spoke about some of the issues GFPD had with the individuals Calumet brought in. The Sentinel project is still pending and is going to be a significant influx of individuals in our community.

Great Falls is a hub in Northcentral Montana. A significant amount of individuals and communities outside Great Falls use Great Falls. GFPD and all public service agencies are providing service to those individuals.

In summary, GFPD is looking critically about how it recruits and retains, has streamlined as much as it can, has changed shifts at the dispatch center and patrol bureau to maximize staffing during peak call loads, is prioritizing cases, and streamlining the crash reporting process.

PSAC Member Reiste received clarification that GFPD's ask of about \$4.5 million of the total levy was to be distributed over a four to five year timeframe as staffing levels increased.

PSAC Member Dodd was referred to Cascade County Sheriff Jesse Slaughter to answer her question about what the Cascade County Sheriff's levy does for her.

PSAC Member Wilson asked about a program for "frequent flyers."

Chief Newton explained that five or six years ago a program was started that included the Sheriff's Office. It required a group of investigators full-time focus to research those individuals. It ultimately came down to lack of staffing and became unmanageable.

He also noted that the GFPD isn't involved in certain programs like it was in past years because it comes down to staffing and prioritizing.

PSAC Member Dodd received clarification that the \$1,499 limit on a first offense theft was a legislative change.

PSAC Member McKenney received clarification that the statistics set forth on slide 7 regarding 2024 overdoses pertain only to GFPD. If GFFR, EMS and emergency rooms were included that number would be significantly higher. He added that there are overdoses occurring in the City that they don't know about because some individuals that are using opioids carry Narcan themselves.

They Narcan their partners to revive them. Through interviews and through investigations, they know that is occurring quite frequently.

PSAC Member Nikolakakos commented that what he is hearing is GFPD needs personnel, man hours, and boots on the ground. What would the consequences be of waking up tomorrow, for example, and having five percent less budget. What would citizens lose immediately.

Chief Newton responded that more individuals would be forced into on-line reporting to free up officers. He would look critically at cutting other programs. The only cuts after that are personnel, which is counterintuitive to what we are talking about today. It comes down to the communication and education aspects, and providing the best service. It would basically put GFPD back about 20 years. The community expects to have information, the community expects GFPD to be involved in other activities, and the community expects some of these programs.

PSAC Member McKamey inquired about the unfunded mandates. Chief Newton provided several examples of Legislative unfunded mandates since 2016. He will provide the committee a list of unfunded State mandates.

PSAC Member Reiste noted that it would appear that on a regular basis one to two officers are in Court dealing with issues and are not on the street responding, or the officers are coming off their night shift and are sitting in Court all morning for potentially someone that isn't even going to show up in Court. This is hard on the officers and their families and the Department, but it's also hard on the community because of the overtime pay.

PSAC Member McKamey inquired the average time that GFPD has a new hire, noting that it takes a lot of money for training and equipment to go along with the personnel.

Chief Newton responded that the last four that resigned had between five to nine years with the Great Falls Police Department.

PSAC Member Dodd commented that if the State is making these mandates, perhaps the PSAC should figure out how the State would be paying for those and reimbursing GFPD.

PSAC Member Rosales inquired how the compensation packages have changed relative to inflation, and how does the salary and benefit package compare to other careers in law enforcement.

Chief Newton responded that GFPD's compensation package is comparable to other cities in the state of Montana. When looking at benefit packages, you also have to look at the cost of living in those respective areas. With regard to inflation, they look at the cost of the CPI and GFPD is in the ballpark.

PSAC Chair Guynn noted that mental health is playing an important role in what has been going on and the challenges that we have. She inquired the arrangement with Many Rivers Health.

Chief Newton commented that GFFD partnered with Alluvion for a Crisis Intervention Training grant for a Mobile Response Team (MRT), because there are calls from a lot of people in crisis, or dealing with mental health related issues. There are individuals that are more trained and more qualified to deal with these individuals in crisis and get them the resources they needed. Alluvion backed out of that program because of staffing. Also because of staffing, Many Rivers Health chose not to engage. Likely, GFFD is going to have to return about \$70,000 of that grant money. GFFD is back to responding to mental health complaints, which is what they were trying to alleviate. While the MRT was running, it was a successful program.

#### **4. PRESENTATION FROM GREAT FALLS FIRE RESCUE (GFFR)**

Deputy Chief EMS Jeremy Virts and Fire Marshal Mike McIntosh reviewed and discussed the PowerPoint slides attached to the agenda packet. Additional discussion included:

- GFFR builds community partnerships to maximize their services delivered to the City.
- GFFR provides delivery of emergency response for advanced life support (ALS) and basic life support (BLS) emergencies.
- The private EMS industry has a harder time providing those services due to retention of employees, and geographically the private agency deploys resources out of one station.
- Across the nation paramedics have been imbedded in fire departments and have had to learn how to treat more complex patients.
- The 39 overdoses Chief Newton discussed required two officers, a fire engine with three staff and an ambulance with two staff.
- The nuts and bolts behind fire prevention services is learning about fire science for more complex problems.
- GFFR equipment gets used 365 days per year. There is a lot of wear and tear on the equipment and it has a service life. Equipment replacement is an ongoing problem.
- The burden of mental health crises falls mostly on the GFFD. GFFR performs preliminary investigations. If the patient doesn't belong in the emergency room, GFFD goes from law enforcement to caregiver at that point.
- GFFR will always have to deal with recognizing and combatting workforce mental stress.
- The fire training facility is old and antiquated to the point that GFFR cannot use the hose tower. The hose tower was a vital part of training because Great Falls has multi-story buildings. They have had to adapt to utilizing the parking garage for training.
- Mutual aid partners, Malmstrom Air Force Base (MAFB) and Montana Air National Guard (MANG), are consistently requested to backfill stations. The problem is that MAFB and MANG have their own missions and areas to fulfill too. If the deployment numbers are heavy at MAFB, GFFR may not get a resource from them.
- GFFR prioritizes calls they go on, and no longer goes to non-emergency incidents. A large number of those non-emergent medical calls resulted in a transport by the private ambulance company.
- There were 3942 overlapping incidents last year, which means two or more resources on a call at one time.



- The national standard is sending 15 firefighters to a structure fire. If GFFR has overlapping resources on calls, there will not be anywhere near 15 firefighters on one structure call, probably more like six. That puts firefighters in danger, causes physical exertion, and exposure to other structures.

In response to PSAC Member Reiste's inquiry, Deputy Chief Virts will provide data from the State reporting system pertaining to the number of EMS calls that are drug related.

PSAC Member Wilson inquired how GFFR deals with "frequent flyers."

Deputy Chief Virts explained that GFFR can't interpret frequent utilizer's perception of an emergency. Sometimes they have no other resources to help. That is why they keep calling. He personally contacts frequent utilizers of the 911 system to determine what it is GFFR can help them with.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired if EMS response was shared with the private company.

Deputy Chief Virts responded that the private company has one location. Geographically, GFFR has four fire stations. So, it is a co-response with the private company. GFFR are first responders with ALS capabilities. GFFR typically gets to the emergent calls first to initiate care. GFFR does not go to the non-emergency calls unless requested. There is an EMS performance contract between the City and the private ambulance service company.

Deputy Chief Virts also discussed the increased need for housing availability.

PSAC Member McKenney asked Deputy Chief Virts to explain the term "abandonment."

Deputy Chief Virts responded that GFFR personnel has a moral, ethical, and legal obligation when they respond and make contact with a patient as emergency care providers. Their license demands that they stay there until the patient is handed off to somebody of equal or higher training or certification. If something is burning across town, their obligation is to that patient at that time, legally and ethically.

Fire Marshal Mike McIntosh reported that less fires within the city contributed to modern building techniques, fire prevention efforts, education, and code enforcement. Taking a stronger stance on code compliance means preventative measures to limit the possibility of fires. GFFR is proactive by taking added safety measures for public safety events so that people can come to Great Falls and enjoy the city and be safe while they are here doing it. There are also added safety requirements for commercial construction.

Since Covid and due to overtime expenses, one of the programs that had to be cut was fire prevention education in the school system.

To lessen the amount of false alarm calls, GFFR can charge for their response after three false alarm calls. It not only lessened false alarm calls, but allowed for GFFR to work with business owners to fix issues with their life safety systems that they did not know existed.

They are also working on implementation of risk reduction technologies within the community. They are engaging the community to provide information to GFFR through a program called "Community Connect." Homeowners can sign up to provide information about their house and the people that reside there. That key information will pop up on the dashboard of the responding engine companies.

Fire Marshal McIntosh also reported that GFFR is a huge player in the development in this community. They work with the Planning and Community Development Department and the Engineering Department when it comes to the growth of the City. The City's geographical boundaries are expanding. With that expansion, GFFR can't meet the national standard response time of four minutes.

The State Legislature hampered municipalities by making it illegal for fire departments to require or even offer home sprinklers for fire suppression to help with development costs. The next Legislative session could drastically impact local jurisdiction's availability to strengthen the codes and fire prevention efforts within the community. There was a recent study about the need for housing and affordable housing for the next 10 years in our community. At the State level they are kicking around a lot of ideas on how to increase housing by lessening codes and standards that are put in place to protect people within the communities.

With the cost of housing going up, property taxes are going up. The ISO rating has a direct impact on homeowners' insurance rates. Great Falls ISO rating went from a two to a three.

In 2023, his division had confirmed arson cases. He worked directly with GFPD detectives to investigate. Those cases are still sitting on a backlog because of the amount of more important cases GFPD has within the community, such as violent crimes.

GFFR has cut basically everything that it can, including services.

PSAC Member Reiste inquired how many positions GFFR has open that are funded.

Fire Marshal McIntosh responded that GFFR is full, with the caveat that two employees are off with major injuries and another two employees will be off to care for major injuries. GFFR was down four staff members during the Covid pandemic and it drove overtime numbers up. People got burnt out on the number of call backs.

PSAC Member Reiste inquired what GFFR's ask was.

Fire Marshal McIntosh responded that the bond ask was to build a fire station and equip that fire station. The mill levy ask was for 33 personnel, inclusive of staff for that new fire station and one position within the Fire Prevention Bureau.

PSAC Member Reiste also received clarification from Police Chief Newton that he currently has nine vacancies that are funded. He also has four personnel on light duty due to injuries or medical reasons. So, technically, GFPD is down 13. GFPD's ask was for 24.

Fire Marshal McIntosh concluded that GFFR is having a hard time recruiting people to come into the public safety sector.

**5. PUBLIC SURVEY/POLL**

Due to a lack of time, this item will be added to a future agenda.

**6. FUTURE AGENDA SUGGESTIONS**

Request from PSAC Member Rosales to discuss Great Falls economic past.

After a brief discussion, Manager Doyon will conduct a high level review of those two historical documents, and he and PSAC Member Rosales will provide a brief overview at the next meeting.

The June 5<sup>th</sup> agenda will also include hearing from Finance about how the City is funded, and from City staff about TIF's and tax abatements.

Topics for future meetings can be emailed to PSAC Chair Guynn.

**MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM COMMITTEE**

None.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Public Safety Advisory Committee, PSAC Member Parcel moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, to adjourn the regular meeting of May 15, 2024, at 8:12 p.m.

Motion carried 9-0.

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Chairperson Sandra Guynn

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Acting Secretary – City Clerk Lisa Kunz

Minutes Approved: June 5, 2024

DRAFT

Regular Public Safety Advisory Committee Meeting Civic Center, 2 Park Drive South,  
Gibson Room 212, Great Falls, MT 59401

**CALL TO ORDER:** PSAC Chair Sandra Guynn called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

**ROLL CALL:** Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) Members present: Sandra Guynn, Jeni Dodd, Joe McKenney, Tony Rosales, Aaron Weissman, and Shannon Wilson. Wendy McKamey and George Nikolakakos arrived at 6:05 p.m.

Absent: PSAC Members Mike Parcel and Thad Reiste.

**1. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

PSAC Chair Guynn commented that the number was missing of confirmed arson cases on page 17, paragraph 6, of the May 15, 2024 Minutes.

PSAC Chair Guynn moved, seconded by PSAC Member Wilson, that the PSAC accept the Minutes of the May 15, 2024, PSAC Meeting as amended to include the number of confirmed arson cases.

PSAC Chair Guynn asked if there were any comments from the public or discussion amongst the Committee. Hearing none, PSAC Chair Guynn called for the vote.

Motion carried – 6-0.

**EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**2. FOLLOW UP PRESENTATION FROM GREAT FALLS FIRE RESCUE**

PSAC Chair Guynn explained that at the May 15, 2024 PSAC Meeting, PSAC Member Reiste had asked how many calls Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) responds to that are related to drugs. Deputy Chief of EMS Jeremy Virts responded (via May 23, 2024 email) that he queried GFFR's reporting system for calls related to "Cardiac Arrest/Death," "Overdose/Poisoning," "Stab/Gunshot," "Unconscious/Fainting," and "unknown problem." The reason the search was this broad is because the response frame of mind for these calls requires our paramedics to "rule out" drugs as a possible cause of the above problems. Possibly half of those calls actually are related to a drug of some sort being in the patient's system and is causing the issue. Stab wounds and/or gunshot injuries were included because there may be a certain percentage of these calls caused by drugs. Ruling out the patient's symptoms and determining that the symptoms are in fact only caused by trauma takes some investigative work on the part of the paramedic on scene. These calls all equate to time and resources needed to mitigate the emergency. The search from May 1, 2023 to May 1, 2024 resulted in 590 calls.

PSAC Chair Guynn mentioned that she further received clarification from Deputy Chief of EMS Virts that the search resulted in 94 calls to adverse reactions to medications.

**3. PUBLIC SURVEY/POLL**

PSAC Member McKenney explained that the City reached out to other communities and a common theme for a successful public safety levy was having professional polling done long beforehand. The City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Ballot Measure Polling and Outreach Consultant Services. The proposals are due June 19, 2024 and a final decision would be made by mid or late July 2024. The anticipated cost for a poll would be approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000.

PSAC Member Weissman suggested exploring subgroup questions and the thought process with regard to why people voted against the public safety levy.

PSAC Member McKenney responded that he believes most people feel safe and did not see the need for the public safety levy.

PSAC Member Nikolakakos stepped out at 6:18 p.m. and returned at 6:22 p.m.

PSAC Member McKamey commented there should be structured questions with regard to why people voted against the levy, as well as reasons for voting for or against the levy. It might be helpful to understand why people voted for the levy. There are several ways to do surveys that are probably not as expensive as what we may think. She suggested exploring some of those options and ways to facilitate a survey.

PSAC Member Wilson mentioned that the cost was \$40,000 to do a survey for House Bill 264, Veterans Long-Term Care Needs Study.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired which communities were asked about polling working for them and if it was specific to public safety levies.

PSAC Member McKenney responded that he did not currently have the information about which communities were asked and would provide that later; however, it was specific to public safety.

PSAC Member Dodd suggested inserting a survey in the water bill instead of an online survey, in order to avoid people who are not in the community participating in a survey. She commented that there was a lot of feedback about why people voted against the levy that the City did not consider and expressed concern about how a survey would help.

PSAC Member McKenney responded that there was a lot of feedback; however, the City needs to do better outreach with regard to what the community feels their needs are and the City was alone with regard to the levy.

PSAC Member Dodd commented that she has heard that there was anger from the community about the City spending \$150,000 of taxpayer money to attempt to talk them into the levy. She added that

\$30,000 for a survey is a lot of money when the average household income for Great Falls is \$58,000.

PSAC Member McKenney responded that those concerns weigh on the City's decision-making.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that data is important to guide decision-making. He believes that \$25,000 to \$30,000 would be accurate for a survey given his experience doing market research. However, that cost could potentially be lower if the City uses a consultant to cover recruitment costs and have in house people or people from the public do the actual data analysis. He added that he would not trust an outside consultant's recommendation since they are not from here.

PSAC Member Dodd commented that she does not want focus groups where only certain people find out about it like what the library did with its survey. She added that she agrees with the outreach aspect and analysis being done in house. However, she is concerned about an actual survey and a consultant telling us what the best option is for the City. PSAC Member Dodd inquired if an RFP could be changed once it has been released. She believes there needs to be more public meetings to discuss with citizens what is needed and not just give presentations.

PSAC Chair Guynn inquired if the Committee is in favor of having some form of outreach done to garner where the public is on this issue.

Responding to PSAC Member Dodd's inquiry, PSAC Member McKenney responded that he is unaware if an RFP could be changed once it has already been released; however, it can be negotiated to what the City finds acceptable.

PSAC Member McKamey commented that she believes that there needs to be more solid data rather than a venting process, because there has been plenty of venting.

PSAC Member Wilson added that education provided by visiting groups and meetings have not worked.

PSAC Member Weissman commented that it is going to cost more money for a survey that asks statistically significant questions to receive real answers. He supports utilizing City staff if they are experienced in statistic and data analysis.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that there are several people who are experienced in statistic and data analysis and should be utilized because it will make the City more efficient in the future. The role of a consultant is to provide expertise; however, he does not believe they bring expertise to a community unless they are a local consultant.

PSAC Member McKamey suggested doing an online survey because it is more efficient to tabulate and analyze.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired how to restrict an online survey to Great Falls citizens.

PSAC Member McKamey responded there could be a QR code.

PSAC Member Dodd commented that a QR code could be spread everywhere.

PSAC Member Rosales added that if it comes down to doing a QR Code that would be a question for a market research agency.

PSAC Member Dodd commented that there was anger from people about the \$150,000 already spent and she is concerned that they will be upset with a survey when they have already expressed why they voted against the levy.

PSAC Member McKamey responded that inquiring why people voted against the levy is exactly what a survey should be asking and if people are angry, that is their problem.

PSAC Chair Guynn explained that a recommendation does not need to be decided tonight and this discussion gives the City Commission and Management some good ideas.

#### **4. OVERVIEW OF GREAT FALLS' ECONOMIC PAST**

City Manager Greg Doyon explained that he will be summarizing two academic papers from PSAC Member Rosales. "Analysis of Financial Problems for the City of Great Falls" by John C. Ingram and "City Government in Great Falls: Trends and Outlook" by Timothy S. Burton. These papers are from 1971 and 1985, so the political environment was different at that time. Since these papers have been written, there has been a multitude of legislative and legal changes to the law. There were economic impacts occurring statewide, nationally, regionally and locally that maybe affected their perspective on how they provided the recommendations.

Manager Doyon reported the following:

##### Themes and Points

- Both papers discuss the financial struggles of Great Falls within the broader context of urban financial crises in U.S. cities.
  - Great Falls has historically been a slow growth community.
  - Three primary economic drivers in Great Falls: Agriculture, Military, Medical.
- Ingram (1971) provides an overview of financial constraints, including hiring freezes and debt issues, while Burton (1985) highlights the decline in financial conditions due to economic factors and overreliance on property taxes.
  - Major financial events since 2008: Recession, Electric City Power settlement and ECP loss write-off; COVID.

##### City Finance Structure and Revenue Sources

- Ingram (1971) details the structure of city finances, including the general fund, water and sewer departments, and trust and agency funds.



- Burton (1985) explains the Montana property tax system, the reduction in the tax base, and the impact on the general fund and state assistance.

### Problems

- Revenue and Tax Base Issues
- Both papers emphasize the insufficiency of revenue from property taxes.
  - Ingram (1971) notes insufficient revenue from property taxes due to legal limits on mill rates, while Burton (1985) highlights the decline in taxable value and the shift to special revenue sources.
  - Both papers discuss the impact of inflation and economic decline on the city's financial health.
- Dependence on Property Taxes
  - Both papers identify overreliance on property taxes as a major issue.
    - Ingram (1971) and Burton (1985) both discuss the limited capacity of property taxes to meet the growing expenditure needs and the pressure on homeowners and businesses.
- Competition and Fiscal Relations
  - Both papers discuss the competition for revenue among city, county, and school districts.
  - They both note the strained fiscal relationship between local and state governments, impacting the city's ability to generate adequate revenue.
    - There have been recent attempts to discuss and coordinate additional levy asks between the school district, Cascade County, and the city.
- Capital Needs and Infrastructure
  - Ingram (1971) discusses the capital needs for water and sewer departments, including the challenges of funding infrastructure expansion.
  - Burton (1985) touches on the financial decline and the need for state assistance to support the city's infrastructure and services.

### Solutions

- Tax and Revenue Reforms
  - Both papers suggest the need for reforms in the property tax system.
    - Ingram (1971) proposes raising the tax rate or shifting certain services to separate funds, while Burton (1985) recommends property tax reform and exploring other tax options, such as local income and sales taxes.
  - Since 2008, this has been a constant call when the legislature is in session: tax reform and local option sales tax.
- State Assistance and Legislative Changes
  - Both papers call for increased state assistance to local governments.
  - Ingram (1971) and Burton (1985) both suggest that the state legislature should grant more fiscal authority to local governments or provide additional state support.
- Efficiency and Cost Reduction
  - Ingram (1971) suggests cost reduction measures, particularly in police and fire services, to alleviate financial strain.

- Both papers recommend implementing efficiency measures and reducing expenditures where possible.
- Annexation and Expansion
  - Ingram (1971) discusses the potential of annexation to expand the tax base and incorporate major employers like the Anaconda Company.
  - Burton (1985) suggests similar measures to increase the tax base and reduce the financial burden on existing taxpayers.
- Exploring New Revenue Sources
  - Both papers suggest exploring new revenue sources, such as local option taxes, service charges, and fees.
  - Burton (1985) specifically outlines various local tax options and the potential for a state lottery to generate additional revenue.
- Summary and Conclusions
  - Paper discuss the need for the city to have Comprehensive Financial Strategies at the local and state level
  - Both papers emphasize the importance of reforming the statewide property tax system, increasing state assistance, and exploring new revenue sources to stabilize the city's financial condition.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired if impact fees for annexations could be put into the fire and public safety budget.

City Manager Doyon responded that there has never been a desire to charge impact fees because that has been perceived as anti-growth and a community needs to be growing in order to benefit from that.

PSAC Member Weissman inquired about the impact of the Sentinel.

City Manager Doyon responded that he heard that Sentinel was over budget and triggered a congressional review. Malmstrom Air Force Base is the largest single mission base and has the largest operating expense. The impact of the Sentinel is unclear because things may change in terms of what the impact is going to be like.

## **5. CITY FUNDING, TIF'S AND TAX ABATEMENTS**

Finance Director Melissa Kinzler provided and discussed a Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Budget handout that included different funding sources of the general fund.

Finance Director Kinzler explained that the total budget for fiscal year 2024 was \$162 million, \$144.3 million of revenue, \$162.4 million of expenses and \$18.1 million in expenses. There is additional cash in the water, sewer, storm drain and sanitation fund that is reserved for capital outlay. There are approximately 56 funds that have their own funding sources with different needs.

According to state statute, those funds cannot be used for public safety and there are strict rules that the City must follow.

The largest revenue is charges for services at 37%. The majority of that is water, sewer, storm drain, and sanitation services. Since receiving ARPA money, the intergovernmental revenue for the budget is any state, county or federal revenue that the City receives and is 18% and taxes is 20.9%. This is the total taxes including the general fund, library taxes with the new mill and tax increment districts.

PSAC Member Weissman commented that with ARPA funds going away, there is \$144 million in revenue and almost 20% was intergovernmental funds. He inquired what the dollar figure would be for 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that the figure would probably be a little less. When the City first received ARPA funds, it was decided not use it for ongoing operations and to use it for capital improvements.

City Manager Doyon added that there was a CARES reimbursement to begin with; however, it was rolled into the undesignated fund balance. CARES funds were utilized to some extent; however, some of it has been held over because of the City's financial situation coming out of COVID. ARPA funds have to be used for COVID related items that are within the scope. Both CARES and ARPA funds were a one-time amount.

PSAC Member Dodd received clarification that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money was used for purchasing fire equipment and an ambulance; however, it cannot be used for ongoing operations.

PSAC Member McKenney received clarification that the general fund is the major fund used for public safety. There is \$24.1 million through taxes, \$916,000 through licenses and permits, \$9.7 million from intergovernmental revenue, outside fire districts pay approximately \$217,000, miscellaneous service charges, \$680,000 through fines and forfeitures every year, 63% of funding the whole general fund is from taxes and 73.6% of the actual cost of the general fund is from personal services.

PSAC Chair Guynn received clarification that \$800,000 of the miscellaneous administration is equipment revolving money put away and cannot be identified to one department or another.

PSAC Member Rosales received clarification that public safety was not cut because of the 72% shortfall of the overall general fund and other sources were found to subsidize recovering from COVID. He commented that the City has had budget shortfalls for the past 50 years and needs to be addressed at the legislative level.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that the general fund budget has been increased approximately 6% since 2014; however, the issue is that there is such a demand for increased services and scarce resources.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that the City is unable to keep up because of the inflationary pressure that it gets from Federal Government spending. The City won't be able to solve these issues from a spending perspective at the City level and needs to be handled at the State and Federal Government level.

PSAC Member Dodd received clarification that the Aim High Big Sky Recreation Center is an enterprise fund and personnel services will be funded by charges for services.

City Manager Doyon added that it is likely that the Aim High Big Sky Recreation Center is going to require an ongoing subsidy from the general fund.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired if considering privatization of Aim High Big Sky Recreation Center to save and have money available for other personnel services has been considered.

City Manager Doyon responded that it is uncertain what a management agreement would look like for a facility like that. The City is going to see how the current staff does with that facility and if it does not work out, privatization could be evaluated as an option.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that there needs to be growth in the City before starting other projects like the aquatics center that require more subsidies from other projects. He inquired if wages the City pays its employees are increasing at the rate of, above or below inflation.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that on average this year it was 3% to 6%; however, it depends on the union.

City Manager Doyon added that approximately every two years, the City does a wage and classification study to ensure positions are competitive with the market because of a noticeable decline in the number and quality of applicants.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that year after year wages are not increasing at the rate of inflation and that is why many people voted against levy in the first place. Expenses are growing far more than what the City is able to bring in to cover the wages of its employees.

City Manager Doyon responded that some years the collective bargaining process is very effective. City staff is doing their homework to ensure that positions are in a range for our jurisdiction and size.

PSAC Member Rosales commented that the City does not have control over the market's increase in wages and is responding to the market. Currently, our market is not increasing wages at the same rate as inflation.

Finance Director Kinzler mentioned that there are certain unions, such as fire and police that look at different wages around the State of Montana and it becomes a State wage. The City has binding arbitration and collecting bargaining agreements that are different from a normal salary market area.

City Manager Doyon added that if fire and police unions went to arbitration, the decision is binding and the arbitrator ultimately decides what the City is going to spend on those contracts.

PSAC Member Dodd inquired if City staff has looked at every department for privatization opportunities to lower personnel costs.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that there has not been an official study done; however, the City attempts to get efficiencies with all employees with regard to the budgeting process.

PSAC Member Weissman inquired about the change in full time employees (FTE) as a result of the Aim High facility compared to the when the Natatorium was operating?

Finance Director Kinzler responded that a budget for the Aim High Big Sky has not been adopted yet, so those numbers are not firm at this point. There will be an increase in FTE's because Aim High Big Sky is more substantial than the Recreation Center.

PSAC Chair Guynn inquired how much money the City does not collect because of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that revenue from county, city and school districts goes into a TIF district. The City's proportionate share is about 28% of that TIF revenue and can be used for public improvements. Annual increment is about \$4 million; however, that is the total share of the tax increment and 28% to 29% of that would be the City's portion of TIF money. The City gave Calumet a tax abatement that was estimated to be about a \$2 million revenue loss. Calumet also protested their valuation and there is approximately \$1 million in the general fund that the City would not receive. Finance Director Kinzler added that just because there is a new building does not necessarily mean there will be actual property value on it, because it could be in a TIF district, have a tax abatement against it or be a nonprofit.

PSAC Member Rosales inquired how much of our taxes go to pay for the animal shelter versus how much is done through fees they collect.

Finance Director Kinzler responded that she did not have that specific number tonight and would provide it to Mr. Rosales later.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM COMMITTEE**

PSAC Chair Guynn reported that PSAC Member Weissman was absent from the May 15, 2024 PSAC meeting and had inquired the following:

- The cost of Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) to respond to an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) call.
- The cost for Great Falls Emergency Services (GFES) to respond to the same call.

- Areas of duplication of services/work between Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) and Cascade County Sheriff's Office (CCSO).
- Opportunities for financial savings through coordination between these two agencies.

Fire Chief Jeremy Jones responded (via June 4, 2024 email), GFFR does not assign a cost per call for any of the services it provides. GFFR's focus is responding to life-threatening emergencies in a timely manner that is dictated by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) and the National Fire Protection Administration (NFPA). As far as what the cost for GFES to provide the call, PSAC Member Weissman would have to contact, GFES Manager Groh to see if they assign a cost per call. GFFR does not oversee their budgeting or books and does not have the information available to make a determination on a private company.

PSAC Chair Guynn explained that in his email, Fire Chief Jones went into detail about the state statutes that GFFR and GFES require.

Police Chief Jeff Newton responded (via June 4, 2024 email), regarding the CCSO, there are no duplications of efforts. We work as closely as we can when needed. For example, over the past year, we have added deputies to our High Risk Unit (HRU). When we have a major incident in Great Falls, such as a homicide, we have asked for their assistance due to simply needing additional staff members (but we still have primary investigatory jurisdiction). There have also been circumstances when all of our officers are tied up with priority calls, and have had to ask for assistance from the CCSO to handle a few calls until we were able to free up staff. Mr. Weissman may have seen CCSO deputies conducting traffic stops in the City. They, like the Montana Highway Patrol, can make traffic stops anywhere in the County, and have the authority to do so. However, the CCSO is not consistently taking calls nor doing the work of the GFPD.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Al Rollo**, 816 Grizzly Dr., commented that he had to vote against the public safety levy because of being on a fixed income and increases in taxes, insurances, utilities, and food. He further commented that working with the State legislature is crucial. Mr. Rollo added that without a tax reduction in one area, he does not have the money to pay it where he should be. He expressed appreciation to the police and fire departments for all that they do.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Public Safety Advisory Committee, PSAC Member Wilson moved, seconded by PSAC Member Rosales, to adjourn the regular meeting of June 5, 2024, at 7:55 p.m.

Motion carried 8-0.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson Sandra Guynn

\_\_\_\_\_  
Acting Secretary – Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea

Minutes Approved: June 19, 2024

DRAFT

**Public Safety Advisory Committee**  
**Discussion Questions**  
**June 19, 2024**

1. Do you feel that police, fire, legal and court provide adequate service levels to the community?
2. If you don't feel that services are adequate to service the community - now and with future growth - where are services specifically deficient?
3. If you were to prioritize those deficiencies, what does that look like and for what departments?
4. What options remain for the commission to fund resources you have prioritized?