



The Weekly Update – July 24, 2025

Attachments:

1. Journal of City Commission Work Session, July 1, 2025.
2. Journal of City Commission Work Session, July 15, 2025.

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
July 1, 2025 – City Commission Work Session
Civic Center, Gibson Room 212 -- 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, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler and Deputy Finance Director Kirsten Wavra, Municipal Court Judges Steve Bolstad and Mark Dunn and Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ben Forsyth, City resident, commented that in the 14 work sessions he has presented about the harms of marijuana, the City Commission has not responded in a positive way about discussing this so it can have the knowledge to make the best decisions about this issue. Mr. Forsyth opined that the Commission is creating support for the harms of marijuana that are affecting people in the community. He requested that the Commission do its job according to Article 2, Sections 3 and 4 of the Constitution of the State of Montana, as well as several other existing State laws.

Richard Irving, City resident, commented that the Great Falls Public Library has blown the Commission's non-partisan cover again when it reappointed a member to the Library Board. It became easy for the Library Director and Board to partner with a democratic party to espouse the democratic party version of the history of Juneteenth rather than the neutral version. Mr. Irving suggested that the Commission do not allow the library to have the area for children in the basement when the library does its remodeling.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. FY2026 MUNICIPAL COURT BUDGET PRESENTATION

Municipal Court Judge Steve Bolstad reported that the Court is not a money-maker for the City and it distributes justice. The \$100,000 shortfall in fines and forfeitures on the Court's budget is a symptom of a larger problem. The failing of the Public Safety Levy has changed community policing, enforcement, the security of the City, and increased traffic citations and warrants being issued. The Great Falls Police Department (GFPD)

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has gone mainly to reactive policing to violent crimes, which takes officers away from minor offenses.

Judge Bolstad provided and discussed a May 29, 2025 GFPD statistic handout that was prepared to see the results of a problem Municipal Court was having with the Cascade County Detention Center accepting misdemeanor violators at the jail. There were 4,007 GFPD citations issued in 2025 and several more were issued in dates prior. There were 507 Failed to Appear Warrants issued in 2025 compared to 151 in 2020. Individuals do not show up because they know there are no consequences for failing to appear on a warrant. There is no jail space, individuals can be turned away and the county is not funding it the way it should be. There were 65.20 inmates per month in 2025 and 79.33 in 2020. If jail is not there as a deterrent, it works contrary to what Municipal Court is trying to do. These shortfalls will continue and potentially double if something is not done. Judge Bolstad concluded that he is not sure if there are any other choices besides trying another Public Safety Levy or issue a bond and building a City jail.

Municipal Court Judge Mark Dunn explained that factors that play into the reduction in fines included the shortfall of officers who now must be reactive versus proactive. Before the Court can impose a fine, it must make an inquiry as to an individual's ability to pay a fine. If it is determined that an individual cannot pay a fine, it will be reduced, suspended or not imposed based on a Supreme Court decision. The Court cannot impose a fine based on an individual's inability to pay and jail time could be imposed instead. Legislative initiatives will also influence the reduction in fines.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the Cascade County Pre-Trial Program has not been in collaboration with Municipal Court.

City Manager Greg Doyon inquired what happens to a community if criminal behavior is incentivized when they are allowed to get away with misdemeanors time after time.

Judge Bolstad responded that misdemeanors add up and if criminals realize there is no discipline or consequences, it can lead to worse circumstances. Several individuals with misdemeanors are the same individuals with felonies and many defendants with homicides are defendants in Municipal Court. All of this worries him as a resident of Great Falls and as a judge.

Judge Dunn added that there was an individual in Municipal Court with 31 warrants for failing to appear. Individuals lose respect for the court and law enforcement because there is no accountability and become bolder when there are no consequences.

Commissioner Tryon inquired if there will be more incarcerations from the City at the jail once the construction there is completed and what the major contributing factor is as to why the fines are down.

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Judge Bolstad responded that he had been assured that they will; however, he was informed that there are already too many individuals incarcerated and was asked to get some out. The major contributing factor as to why fines are down is because the Public Safety Levy did not pass. Now the City is doing reactive policing and there is a lack of jail space.

Municipal Court Supervisor Morgan Medvec added that there was also a decline in fines when the legislature passed a law where the Court could not suspend driver's licenses for failure to pay. Court is doing well with collections which helps support past paid fines that would not have been paid. In general, there is a change of tone with regard to court and authority. The canned food drive, where individuals can have \$50 removed from their fines, is down also.

Commissioner Tryon commented that having a City jail again needs to be considered. There needs to be alternative forms of punishment so there is accountability for individuals who cannot pay their fines.

Judge Dunn responded that community service, house arrest or pre-release are other effective alternatives.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that house arrest costs \$10 daily and pre-release is over \$30 daily. If defendants cannot pay fines, they more than likely cannot for those options.

Commissioner McKenney received clarification that two courtrooms will be running at the same time once the renovation is complete.

2. 2026 PROPOSED BUDGET DISCUSSION, CONTINUED FROM JUNE 26, 2025

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that he would provide a list of the Above and Beyond Requests to the Commission.

Finance Director Melissa Kinzler and Deputy Finance Director Kirsten Wavra reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office) regarding the Fiscal year 2026 Great Falls Budget. Highlights included:

- General Fund Recap.
- City-Wide Revenues.
- Proposed Assessment and Utility Rate Adjustments.
- City-Wide Expenses.
- City-Wide Expenses by Category.

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- City-Wide Expenses by Function.
- Capital Outlay, Pages 127-131.
- Employee Summary, Pages 121-126.
- Fund Review, Fund Detail Worksheet.
- Upcoming Budget Process.

Finance Director Kinzler explained that the amount from the entitlement share was less than anticipated because the State of Montana received less revenue and on average has been increasing every year approximately \$300,000. There is approximately \$4.3 million of tax revenue in Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts; however, that money cannot be used for general fund support and can only be used for public improvements in those districts.

City Manager Doyon explained that TIF districts are one of the few economic development tools the City has; however, there is an impact on the budget when the City utilizes them.

Commissioner McKenney commented that when there is economic development in the community, it is in TIF districts.

City Manager Doyon mentioned that there was a unique development agreement when Portage Meadows subdivision was constructed. The agreement was that there would be public green space and the City would maintain it. Years ago, he tried to ensure that the City is not inadvertently subsidizing the maintenance that occurs there and charging the cost for the service. There is a legal way to undo what was done when that subdivision was created.

Commissioner Tryon received clarification that page 133 of the FY2026 Proposed Budget lists the long-term debt schedule.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that a workforce housing/TIF semi-annual update and FY26 proposed budget (if needed) will be topics for the July 15, 2025 work session.

Commissioner Tryon requested that an update about Scheels Aim High Big Sky (SAH BS), Park and Rec, Civic Center and Multi-Sports be added to an upcoming work session after this year's budget process is over.

Manager Doyon responded that it might be a little early to add to an upcoming work session. After an award is made on the RFP, the consultant could provide the City with its

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recommendations. Next year's budget will start early, and he recommended having quarterly budget meetings with the Commission to identify potential savings or service reductions. The RFP is for a Comprehensive Fee Study, Cost Allocation Plan, and Park and Recreation Operational Efficiency Review.

Commissioner Wolff commented that she is not sure that the public is aware of everything SAHBS has to offer unless they go into the facility.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of July 1, 2025 at 6:49 p.m.

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July 15, 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 Interim Deputy City Manager Bryan Lockerby, City Attorney David Dennis, Public Works Deputy Director Lonnie Hill, Fire Chief Jeremy Jones, Police Chief Jeff Newton, and Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

Mayor Reeves reported that Calumet requested to give presentations to the City Commission regarding its upcoming projects that intersect with the City.

Commissioner Wolff responded that Calumet could provide public meetings at its site because of the busy load of the work sessions.

Commissioner McKenney responded that he supports Calumet providing updates to the Commission because it is the City's number one taxpayer.

Commissioner Wilson concurred with Commissioner Wolff's comments.

Commissioner Tryon responded that Calumet could provide a community update periodically at City Commission meetings, because work sessions are usually reserved for issues that may be on an agenda.

Calumet Refinery Vice President of Government Relations Krista Evans commented that Calumet wants to be more transparent about what projects it is working on, and presentations would take approximately 15 minutes.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Commission to have Calumet provide public meetings at its site.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Written correspondence expressed support of banning fireworks in the City was received from **Gordon Whirry** (via July 8, 2025 email), **Bruce Pollington** (via July 10, 2025 email), **Carol Bronson** (via July 11, 2025 email), **Anitra Hall** (via July 15, 2025 email), **Tammy**

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Nathe (via July 13, 2025 email), **Lisa Hardiman**(via July 14, 2025 email), **Pam Guschausky** (via July 14, 2025 email), **Dick and Melodee Scott** (via July 14, 2025 email), **Robert Jordan** (via July 10, 2025 written correspondence), **Janet Henderson** (via July 15, 2025 email), **Carrie Reisig** (via 7/15/25 email), **Candice Griffith** (via July 15, 2025 email),

Ben Forsyth, City resident, commented that this is the 15th work session where he has presented scientifically documented harms of marijuana and the City Commission has not consented to discussing. Mr. Forsyth provided and discussed a research study handout about the harms of marijuana.

Ron Paulick, City resident, provided a prepared statement regarding a July 11, 2025 email titled Utility Rate Increased to Fund Infrastructure Needs.

Carol Bradley, 1826 3rd Avenue North, commented that she used to love the 4th of July holiday but now dreads it because the fireworks in Great Falls have completely gotten out of hand. Ms. Bradley added that she hopes that the death of the elderly woman whose house caught on fire because of a firework serves as a tipping point to the Commission to show leadership on behalf of the thousands of City residents who do not like fireworks. Ms. Bradley expressed concern about the impact that fireworks have on people, animals, veterans and individuals with PTSD.

Candice Griffith, City resident, commented that she is a twenty-year retired major of the Montana Army National Guard and is requesting a change to the city ordinance which allows fireworks to be discharged in city limits. It is unfortunate that it took the untimely death of an elderly woman and her pets for this issue to be addressed. She understands the importance of freedom and the celebration of it. However, she requested, as a veteran who was exposed to indirect fire attacks, a dog handler for PTSD and concerned citizen, that the Commission consider limiting fireworks on the 4th of July and New Year holidays to be discharged outside of city limits and by approved permit only. Ms. Griffith expressed concern that fireworks are discharged in the City outside of the approved dates, preventing individuals from sleeping, creating litter and posing the risk of fire and death.

Shannon Linns, City resident, commented that fireworks being shot off by individuals in the City are extremely loud, it is like being in a warzone and unnecessary when there is a City display. Ms. Linns expressed opposition to personal fireworks in the City.

Rick George, a non-city resident, commented that he works at a fireworks stand and is concerned about limiting what individuals can do and taking away stuff people loved as kids. Back in the day, people and dogs were fine and he does not know what difference it makes now. Mr. George commented that the lady who passed away ran back into a burning building to save a cat, and the cause of the fire was possibly fireworks. If fireworks are prohibited in the City, then other things need to be prohibited as well. He expressed concern about the enforcement if fireworks are banned in the City.

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Pete Anderson, 4044 Ella Avenue, suggested that the Commission consider a pay-to-play permit system regarding fireworks to generate additional revenue for the City. Mr. Anderson expressed opposition to prohibition measures, especially when it has been a tradition for a long time. He requested a work session about using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds for Downtown Workforce Housing.

Referring to Mr. Anderson's request, Mayor Reeves responded that the City is currently exploring downtown TIF's.

Garla Boland, commented that she does not understand why a one-day holiday needs to last and be celebrated for three days or longer.

Julie Essex, City resident, commented that she suffers from sleep deprivation during the 4th of July and her dog suffers from PTSD whenever there are fireworks. She previously lived in Denver, CO, where there is a ban on the purchase, sale and ignition of fireworks. People would drive to Cheyenne, WY and ignite them in Denver and there was never any enforcement on the fireworks ban. Having another ordinance that is not going to be enforced because of the lack of funding public safety is going to create an additional number of criminals in the City and completely banning fireworks is not the solution.

Michael Maeder, 2407 Central Avenue West, commented that previously, the ignition of fireworks was for 12 days and now it is for three days. It is ironic that people want to take away the ability to celebrate freedom in a traditional way. Mr. Maeder added that the fireworks do not go off all night and they tone down around midnight. He is a combat veteran diagnosed with PTSD and has sold fireworks to other veterans with PTSD at his fireworks stand. Taking fireworks away from those who love it is beyond his understanding. No one pays attention to laws and fireworks are still ignited in every City in Montana that has a ban.

Destri Hilbig, City resident, commented that it has not been proven that the lady who died from the fire was from fireworks. Ms. Hilbig added that the lady did not die from fireworks, she died from a fire that she went back into. The lady was also a hoarder, and her grass was too high, in which there is an ordinance for; however, law enforcement does not have time to enforce. She suggested that the Commission focus on the things that it already has happening that it cannot handle and find ways to manage them before it adds more to the police force that is struggling as it is.

Greg Hall, City resident, commented that he is on the People's Park and Rec Foundation that is responsible for putting on a fireworks show for one night on the 4th of July every year. He likes the ignition of fireworks in a controlled environment versus in neighborhoods because the types of fireworks being set off in neighborhoods are like professional grade fireworks. He expressed support of having a fireworks ban be put on a ballot.

Jeff Thill, City resident, commented that he is a fireworks operator, has approximately 10,000 unique sales to individuals a year and sells fireworks to Helena and Bozeman. The

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other cities in Montana that have outlawed fireworks light off just as many fireworks within the city limits. Mr. Thill expressed support of controlling the rules that the City has in place. Mr. Thill commented that his dogs love fireworks; however, he sympathizes with people who have dogs that do not like them. The City has the smallest grade of fireworks that can be ignited. There are large organizations that look at the number of fireworks sold and the number of injuries per 1,000 pounds of fireworks. Fireworks sales have gone up since the 1970's and injuries have gone down. If fireworks are banned, they will still be sold in the County and ignited inside the City.

Mayor Reeves announced that the Workforce Housing TIF update would be moved to agenda item 2.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. CITY COMMISSION DISCUSSION ON FIREWORKS

Mayor Reeves inquired if a fireworks ban would be another ordinance that the Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) would not be able to enforce.

Police Chief Jeff Newton responded that since June 1, 2025 to today, GFPD has responded to 5,138 calls for service and written 1,542 reports. GFPD is running approximately 116 calls per day with 14 officers in the field over a 24-hour time frame. Priority calls require more officers to respond and impacts all public safety departments. It comes down to resource management and allocation of resources. GFPD must prioritize calls and if it receives a firework complaint versus a gun, it will send its resources to where the priority call is.

Commissioner Wilson expressed concern for individuals with PTSD and veterans who are in recovery or in the Veterans Treatment Court because fireworks can be a trigger for them. Commissioner Wilson expressed support of putting it on a ballot and not an ordinance.

Commissioner Wolff commented that there were large fireworks in her neighborhood that exceeded three days. She understands people wanting to celebrate the founding of this country. However, the lady who died in the house fire had a right to live and a right to have a safe home. If she was a hoarder, that had nothing to do with the fact that a fire was started in her area and went into her home. The Commission needs to step up and make the decision about fireworks. Commissioner Wolff expressed support of banning personal fireworks and putting in place things to help the GFPD and GFFR, such as budgeting for overtime and instituting heavy fines for those not following the law. She commented that she is aware that banning fireworks would have an impact on the livelihood for those selling fireworks; however, it is not going to stop with this one lady, not with the kind of fireworks being shot off. She understands that people will go to the County to get fireworks, but she cannot say it is okay when there was a loss of life.

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Commissioner Tryon explained that the issue of fireworks comes up every year from individuals who are concerned and frustrated about the level of fireworks going on in residential neighborhoods. He started this initiative because of the people who have concerns about personal fireworks in the City and they deserve to have their concerns addressed. The Commission needs to ensure those individuals that it is not ignoring their concerns. The two options are to either put it on a ballot in November 2025 or have the City Commission vote on it. Commissioner Tryon proposed having Legal staff draft a resolution that would prohibit the sale and discharge of fireworks within the city limits and either put it on the ballot or have the City Commission vote on it. He explained that his preference is to put it on a ballot; however, there would be a short timeline to do that.

Commissioner McKenney commented that the three questions before the Commission are if fireworks should be limited in some fashion, can it be enforced, and who makes the decision. He is not ready to make a decision tonight and would like another work session to have options presented to the Commission such as keeping it as is, limiting fireworks or a ban. He expressed support of the City Commission making the decision and not putting it on a ballot.

Mayor Reeves explained that he cannot support any ordinance prohibiting or limiting the discharge of fireworks until GFRD and GFRR can adequately enforce and manage the call loads on the 4th of July and enforce what is in the books currently.

Commissioner Wolff expressed support of having another work session to hear from the GFRD and GFRR about the impact it would have on their departments.

City Attorney David Dennis reported that the last day for the first reading would be July 30, 2025, the last day for the second reading for a resolution and ordinance would be August 11, 2025 and would require special meetings.

Commissioner Tryon commented that he does not want to keep discussing this issue repeatedly at work sessions. He suggested having a straightforward resolution that is voted on regarding the prohibition of fireworks in the city limits unless there is a permit.

Commissioner Wolff concurred with Commissioner Tryon; however, the Commission was elected to make hard decisions. Commissioner Wolff suggested creating a resolution that bans fireworks and with that, making sure there is enough money in the budget for overtime for the GFRD and GFRR.

It was the consensus of the Commission to have another special work session.

Mayor Reeves clarified that Commissioners McKenney and Wolff suggested that the decision should be made by the Commission. Commissioners Wilson and Tryon suggested that it should be on a ballot. Mayor Reeves agreed to a ballot but with options. He commented that the Commission needs to be mindful about City staff having the time and resources to compile everything needed prior to next Wednesday.

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Commissioner Wolff announced that she would be gone from August 6 to August 16, 2025.

City Manager Doyon explained that he would propose some dates to the Commission for a special work session about what the ballot language and ordinance would look like.

2. WORKFORCE HOUSING/TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) UPDATE

Due to the lack of time, the Workforce Housing/TIF update will be rescheduled to another work session.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

Due to the lack of time, there was no discussion of potential upcoming work session topics.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of July 15, 2025 at 6:50 p.m.