

Great Falls Citizens Council Minutes

Tuesday, October 28, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.

Civic Center – Gibson Room

Chair Sandra Guynn opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Neighborhood Council representatives in attendance: NC1 Absent; NC2 Tim Croft; NC3 Kathleen Gessaman; NC4 Sandra Guynn; NC5 Howard Plouffe; NC6 Rick Cornellier; NC7 Trevor Mikkelsen; NC8 Karen Grove; NC9 Barney Danishefsky. Great Falls City Commissioners: Mayor Cory Reeves and Commissioner Joe McKenney.

Old Business: Karen Grove moved to accept the minutes as written. Kathleen Gessaman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

Great Falls Police Department update: GFPD Chief Jeff Newton provided an overview of the department activities. He said the department has added a fifth member to the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. He said the Summer Downtown Safety Initiative was created as a response to the downtown business owners experiencing a myriad of problems. From June 16 to August 31 the department placed the SROs in the downtown area. The officers responded to 964 calls for service. He said they have 92 officers assigned to the department and have two vacancies, and one pending retirement in November. There are two vacancies in the civilian staff and five vacancies in dispatch. He said the department's drone program is a success. They've assisted the United States Air Force, Cascade County, and helped with a crime committed in Anaconda. He asked for help from the neighborhood councils with getting information out to residents on the recent increase of firearm thefts from unsecured vehicles. Hit and run vehicle incidents are increasing and he asked residents to report any activity they may have witnessed. There are now 10 to 15 hit and run incidents per week. He said there are 110 to 120 calls for service each day and they average 15 officers working during each 24-hour period to handle those calls. NC6 representative Rick Cornellier asked about the recent threats made to officers. Chief Newton discussed the threats and false information placed on social media. Council of Councils Chair Sandra Guynn asked for an update to the Crimemapping program. Chief Newton said the department will likely move to a different model in the future as the analytics are complex.

Calumet Community Update: Senior Vice President of Montana Operations Kollin Schade provided information on refinery operations. He said he has led the refinery for the past year and a half. He said safety is a core value of the company. The company employs 300 personnel with an average salary and benefit of \$140,000. The salaries and benefits paid by the company totaled more than \$28 million in 2024. He said Calumet has invested heavily into the company. There are two separate businesses associated with Calumet: renewable (Montana Renewable) and hydrocarbon (Montana Refinery). He said it takes 7.7 million acres of canola oil per year to feed the refinery. They secured a Department of Energy loan at \$1 billion that will be paid back. He said the footprint of the refinery will not be expanding with the Missouri River located to the south and Walmart to the north. He said as far as the renewable wash water, everything they are using to clean is grown in the ground. They wash the material and the processed water is disposed of. The company has purchased equipment to process the material and their goal is to discharge it as they discharge water. They had been disposing of 3,000 barrels of water per day and are now down to 700 barrels of water per day. NC3 Representative Kathleen Gessaman asked when the company plans to build the wastewater treatment plant. He said there is no time frame available at

this time. He said the Montana Department of Revenue and Calumet have agreed on a tax settlement. NC9 Barney Danishefsky asked if the additional rail lines leading to the refinery will block traffic at the crossing. Kollin Schade said the additional lines will reduce the switches and reduce the inconvenience for the city. He said the refinery has been in operation for 103 years and has grown over time and they are trying to continue making improvements. For community engagement, the company is planning to conduct a Business After 5 event at the Black Eagle Community Center on November 13. They will be making company donation announcements at that time. The company is at 50 percent participation with their personnel in United Way, and their personnel have contributed \$89,000.

Great Falls Park and Recreation Department update: Interim Director of Great Falls Parks and Recreation Department Jessica Compton discussed the Park Maintenance District created in 2018. She said with the years of deferred park maintenance the Park and Recreation Department wanted to create a park maintenance district. The department receives \$1.5 million annually to cover the cost of projects, and it is a 20-year project that covers, staffing, fees, and the debt service on the Aim High Big Sky facility. She said many of the park playgrounds are 20 to 30 years old. The department purchased an \$8,000 plastic welder to help repair playground equipment. Three full-time employees and some of the department's seasonal employees pay is covered by the district. She said the yearly fertilizer bill is \$65,000. The department also uses the maintenance district to receive matching funds. She said a future project is purchasing electric hand dryers for the parks. She discussed the Adopt a Park program where a person can devote 2 hours each month to provide more eyes and ears on the parks. She said they are using the cloud-based Productive Parks software to help the department become more streamlined. New staff members are working at the Aim High Big Sky facility and they will be having an open house on November 13 to let the public see what the facility offers. NC3 Representative Howard Plouffe asked what the department had planned for the future with tennis courts. Jessica Compton said they are currently going through an assessment with the United States Tennis Association. They will determine the quality of the courts and the association will help with determining if a court should be a tennis court or a multi-purpose court. She said the organization will help with finding funding to improve the courts.

Great Falls Gazette presentation: Publisher Andy Anderson said the Great Falls Gazette is a family-ran business and is focused 100 percent on Great Falls. He said the paper wants to reengage people with civic discussion. He said the paper is printed three times each week and it now has over 4,000 readers between the digital and print editions of the paper. He said the readership age group of 45-55 is the top demographic.

Council Sharing:

NC1: No report was provided.

NC2: The individual who wanted a study done to create a quiet zone will be transferred to Alaska and would like to drop his proposal. An individual concerned about flooding on the northwest side of Great Falls was informed about the Code Red alert program.

NC3: The council conducted a successful Summer Celebration. Neighbors have been concerned about losing easy access to the River's Edge Trail with the rail crossing closing. The city placed new 25 mph lettering on 2nd Street N.E. that is helping slow traffic in the area.

NC4: The council district will be seeing six projects in development. The mobile home park development has encompassed two meetings with more than 160 people in attendance. A special meeting will be called for November 20 to discuss a new project to be built at 57th Street and 3rd Avenue South. Sherrie Arey from NeighborWorks Great Falls presented a briefing on the Baatz Apartments.

NC5: Montana House Majority Leader Steve Fitzpatrick provided a briefing to the council on taxes. Andrew Finch also discussed the Long Range Transportation Plan. Col. Scott Smith briefed the council on the mission and new aircraft coming to the 120th Airlift Wing. Super One sponsored their ice cream social. They have been broadcasting their meetings on Facebook Live. The council also sponsored the recent Great Falls City Mayor/Commissioner Forum. The council has been following the Benefis housing development being built in their district.

NC6: KB Homes attended the council meeting and discussed the 60-70 homes being built near the Peak. They discussed traffic problems between 7th Street and 4th Street running to 10th Avenue South. They are concerned about the city's plan for traffic at that location. They have been collecting data using Crimemapping and have seen large crime spikes.

NC7: The council has had a standard agenda item added to their agenda in support of the public safety levy. They feel education and grassroots support is the way to get increased funding for the fire and police departments and lower insurance rates. The Baatz Building has had an open house and is taking on tenants. The Marony Park playground has been completed. Toby's House will be building a new home in property purchased near Carter Park. The council was happy to see the increased police presence during the summer months.

NC8: The council held its annual ice cream social at Memorial Park. There are still traffic issues experienced on 1st and 2nd avenue North. Restricting parking on one side of the street might be an option. There will be no meetings held in November or December.

NC9: The council has experienced an attendance problem with its members. There were two resignations. Since September another member resigned leaving the council with no quorum. There have been residents complaining about noise coming from the recently opened Pizza Ranch.

Meeting agenda suggestions: Calumet will be contacted to see if they would like to return to present the PowerPoint presentation in January.

Neighborhood Concerns: NC3 Kathleen Gessaman has viewed pedestrians and bicyclists on the River Road near the railroad overpass and suggested that signs could be placed to direct people safely to the trail and off the road.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Peterson, NC3 Secretary and Sandra Guynn, Council of Councils Chair