

## **GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION**

### **Minutes of the April 17, 2025 Meeting**

Vice Chair Jayson Olthoff called the Parking Advisory Commission meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. in the Planning and Community Development Conference Room at the Civic Center.

**Members Present:** Inge Buchholz, Chair  
Jayson Olthoff, Vice Chair  
Carol Berg  
Katie Hanning  
Nathan Laidlaw

**Ex-Officio Member:** Kellie Pierce via Zoom

**Members Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Brock Cherry, Director  
Lonnie Hill, Deputy Director  
Alaina Mattimiro, Associate Planner  
Jamie Nygard, Sr. Administrative Assistant

**Others Present:** Tena Grigsby with SP+, Evan Pryor with Metropolis via Zoom

**Meeting Minutes:** Mr. Olthoff asked if there were any comments or corrections to the February 20, 2025, Parking Advisory Commission meeting minutes. Seeing none, Ms. Hanning motioned to approve the minutes, and Ms. Buchholz seconded.

**Vote:** All in favor, the motion passed 5-0

### **New Business**

#### **Financial Presentation**

Mr. Cherry presented the financial status of the parking fund, noting that it has been operating at a deficit since FY 2021. The fund has consistently fallen short of expenses by \$60,000 to \$110,000 annually. However, significant one-time transfers from CARES and ARPA funding in FY 2022 and FY 2023 helped offset those losses. Despite the transfers, the fund is expected to go negative by the end of the current fiscal year. Mr. Cherry emphasized that the fund's negative balance would have occurred sooner without these one-time federal transfers. He also mentioned that the fund's operations would not be immediately affected, but changes would be necessary to sustain the fund over the next five years.

Mr. Cherry discussed the potential use of up to \$50,000 for signage and installation, with a target of \$30-\$35,000. He also mentioned the history of the parking program and the allocation of TIF funds, emphasizing the importance of public infrastructure for local commerce and development. He noted that the TIF program is currently healthy, producing approximately 2 million dollars of new increment annually. Still, there are concerns about potential changes in legislation affecting how the funds are collected. Mr. Cherry also mentioned the need to define the ideal parking program and the possibility of scaling down what third parties provide.

Due to budget constraints, Mr. Cherry discussed the need for strategic changes to maintain the current level of service in the next five years. He proposed conducting an exercise with the team to identify simple ideas to improve customer experience and incentivize program usage.

Mr. Cherry discussed the parking programs in Montana cities, noting that most use smart meters, kiosks, app-based payment systems, and license plate-based enforcement. He highlighted the need to reduce human interaction to lower costs, but emphasized the importance of maintaining high-quality technology and customer service. He also compared the parking fees in various cities, suggesting that Bozeman's rates are high, while Helena's are tiered and Great Falls' are comparatively low. He concluded by expressing concern about the potential impact on deferred maintenance.

Mr. Cherry discussed the differences in parking governance and administration between Great Falls and other sister cities. He noted that Great Falls currently administers its parking program as a secondary responsibility within a broader departmental framework, limiting its ability to prioritize capital improvements, manage enforcement, and strategically evolve the system. In contrast, other cities have formalized parking divisions with dedicated staff, enabling them to proactively plan and manage their parking systems. He also highlighted the need for more staffing capacity to address capital improvement projects and other issues in Great Falls' parking system.

Mr. Cherry discussed the meeting schedules of various parking authorities and boards, suggesting that they could potentially meet less frequently to have more meaningful conversations. He also mentioned a proposal for free 2-hour parking in the North Parking garage during holidays, which was sent to the Commissioners for their opinion. Mr. Cherry emphasized that the proposal was not a bad idea, even though the funds involved were minimal, as it could help prevent the government's services from becoming weaker.

Mr. Laidlaw mentioned the idea of introducing a membership program to generate revenue.

Ms. Buchholz expressed concern about the proposed program's impact on downtown businesses and the need to attract customers back to the area. Ms. Pierce emphasized the need for a positive perception of parking and suggested public education as a solution. Mr. Cherry agreed and mentioned that they are working on improving the parking system, including better marketing materials and educational resources. They also discussed the need for predictability and ease of use in the parking system. Ms. Buchholz expressed concern about the current enforcement practices. The team agreed on the importance of customer service and the need for better communication with the public about the parking system.

Mr. Cherry discussed the importance of continuous improvement in the parking program, emphasizing the need to avoid stagnation and move forward. He committed to providing a plan for marketing and promotional videos at the next meeting. The team also discussed the challenges of educating customers about parking options and the need to explore different

approaches. Mr. Cherry encouraged the team to think creatively about potential solutions to recurring issues and to trial new ideas.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:10 P.M.