

**Great Falls / Cascade County
Historical Preservation Advisory Commission
MINUTES from the
October 8, 2014 meeting**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ken Robison, Sandi French, Carol Bronson, Carol Ann Clark, Ryan Smith, Kelly Parks, Ken Sievert, Jane Weber, Joan Reeden

MEMBERS ABSENT: Kristi Scott, Paivi Hoikkala, Sarah Burt

STAFF PRESENT: Ellen Sievert, HPO; Lee Nellis, Deputy Planning Director

GUESTS PRESENT: Jerry Clark; Bob Milford; Neil Fourtier, Neighbor Works

As guest Neil Fourtier was present, Sandi asked for a round of introductions.

HPAC Chair Sandi French called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm & asked for approval of the minutes from the September meeting. Ken Robison moved to approve the minutes & Kelly Parks seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

HPO REPORT:

- Ellen handed out copies of the GF/CC HPO Report for September 2014
- Please see the attached report for a detailed summary
- Craftsman District nomination update
 - All material has been submitted to SHPO
 - Review by the state preservation committee will take place this coming January
- Suffrage Event
 - Event to take place October 11, concurrently with the What Women Want Expo
- Montana Main Street Downtown Conference
 - Great Falls was very well represented at the conference with Ellen, Joan, Carol Bronson among those present
- Smelter / Indian Hill site remediation was discussed with Q&A
 - Potential areas of contamination are covered and fenced in
 - Groundwater concerns are currently a part of a study starting at Black Eagle
 - This will become an excellent addition to the River's Edge trail system
- Jim Dolan sculpture project
 - Project will entail a life sized sculpture of 60 buffalo and an Indian village
 - Sites are currently being assessed with the Ulm area and across from the L&C Visitor Center. Ken Sievert iterated the site is crucial for the historical significance of the project with the Ulm site at the top of the list.
 - The project comes with an approximate \$2M price tag

UPDATES:

- Tourism Assessment/Heritage Planning – Lee
 - Premise: the Great Falls area market is shrinking. This event will brainstorm ways to reframe the process and plan to attract more tourism to the Great Falls area.
 - It was clarified the assessment is for the Great Falls region, not just Great Falls
 - The initial 3rd party assessment has been completed

- Assembling a steering committee is the next step
- Promotion of the event was discussed
- The project is partially funded with TBID and other grant funds
- Identification of ways to communicate this project to other interest groups is important
- Promotion of this event at other gatherings such as Get Fit GF's winter snow shoe event would be a way to help spread the word.
- Attendance at this event is a great concern, whereas promotion will be critical
- Makeup of the steering committee was discussed and all agreed HPAC will have involvement. Ken R. suggested Randy Morger and the Sun River Valley Historical Society should also be members of this committee.
- Lee touched on the “constellation of attractions” where tourism should focus on the connectiveness of these individual attractions via central organizing theme and not just as isolated attractions
- This concept will study other precedents in other communities
- Rocky Mountain Building Tax Abatement Discussion – Neil Fournier
 - Neil brought everyone up to speed as to the current development of the Rocky Mountain Building:
 - Multiple funding tracks will be necessary to make this project feasible
 - New Market tax credits, at approximately \$3M, are a critical part of the financing. Currently, the development team is waiting on pending tax credit availability. If these are not immediately available, a new allocation will be available later, but at a delay to the project.
 - Historical tax credits will make up an approximate \$2M portion of the funding
 - The Pantages Theatre redevelopment did not prove financially feasible.
 - New residential use will include 1 & 2 bedroom market-rate apartments in the \$775 to \$900 per month range along with several premium units
 - Ken S. suggested the importance of involving SHPO in the planning process as the project progresses
 - Neil mentioned the Historical Preservation Certification Application - Part 2 is underway. Nelson Architects (Ryan) is involved in preparation of this documentation
 - Close on construction financing March 2015
 - Neil's job is to help educate and sell the funding process of the project
 - Neil clarified the tax abatement process:
 - The incentive to lower operating costs for the 1st five years would eliminate property taxes on the improvements ~~completely~~ for the developers
 - Year ~~6 involves~~ one involves the construction abatement
 - After year 6, the valuation of the property would be reassessed and property taxes would then be assessed
 - If redevelopment of this building does not take place, demolition is inevitable at a substantial price tag. If the building is redeveloped, it will result in ongoing property tax funding for the community
 - October 21st is the next City Commission meeting where this issue will be voted upon

- HPAC agreed a letter, as well as, a strong presence at the commission meeting is essential in showing support for the approval
- Lee mentioned it should not be assumed the City can bear the funding burden alone on this project
- Jane requested talking points of why the HPAC is a proponent of the tax abatement
- Carol B. offered to generate a simple graphic that illustrates why the funding makes sense
- It was suggested a Tribune article help educate the tax payers on the nuances of what a tax abatement is and how it works to show it will cost them less money to support this process
- Lee clarified that Planning & Community Development supports the abatement, but it is critical to gain mass support of the community at the commission meeting.
- Lee will send a link to HPAC with the staff report from the last Commission meeting on this discussion
- Lee announced the City is in the process of looking for a new City planner. This position require historical preservation and redevelopment experience. This announcement received applause from the HPAC.
- Kelly made a motion that the HPAC write a letter in full support of the tax abatement for the Rocky Mountain Building to the City commission. Her motion clarifies this is better option than tearing down the building. She also noted the redevelopment of this building is consistent with the recently adopted Downtown Master Plan as previously approved by the City commission. Ken R. seconded the motion and was unanimously approved by the HPAC. Ellen and Lee offered to start this letter for HPAC approval.
- 2014 Ornament Design
 - Several designs were presented and a motion was made to select Design #3. Kelly seconded this motion and a majority voted in favor of this motion.

The HPAC meeting adjourned at 1:30 pm with the next meeting scheduled for November 12, 2014.

Respectfully submitted by Ryan Smith, HPAC member