

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION
Minutes of December 21, 2015

The Parking Advisory Commission meeting was called to order by Chair Darren Brown at 3:03 p.m. in the Rainbow Room of the Civic Center.

Members Present: Darren Brown, Chuck Fulcher, David Campbell, David Abbott, Kenny Volk

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Connie Rosas, Sr. Admin Asst; Craig Raymond, Director P&CD

Others Present: Bob Kelly, Mayor-elect; Tena Grigsby, Standard Parking; Joan Redeen, Downtown Business Improvement District; Fred Burow, City Commissioner; Greg Franzig, Downtown Great Falls Association

Meeting Minutes: Mr. Brown asked if there were any changes to the minutes of the October meeting. There being none, Mr. Fulcher made a motion to approve those minutes. Mr. Campbell seconded, and all being in favor, the motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

Item 1. Welcome New Commission Member

Mr. Raymond asked that the Parking Advisory Commission (PAC) members introduce themselves and explain what their role is in parking downtown. Mr. Volk said he has owned Kenny's Downtown Convenience Store for about six years, and comes in daily contact with people who have their own opinions and conclusive plans on how parking should be operated in the City. He said he brings his own experience and references, and is excited to share them with the PAC and help be a part of difficult solution. He thanked the PAC for recommending his appointment to the City Commission.

Mr. Campbell stated he owns Amazing Toys and has been on the PAC for six years. Mr. Fulcher operated Lodestone Gallery downtown, and even though he has recently moved out of the building, he continues his interest in parking. As a graphic designer and artist by trade, signage is particularly important to him. Mr. Abbot said he is the Director of the Great Falls Community Food Bank, and he serves on the PAC to ensure adequate and ample parking for local businesses and their patrons. Mr. Brown works part time at the City Bar downtown, has served on the PAC since 2008, and has been the Chair for the past few years. He said there have been a lot of changes in parking over the years, and though it has been frustrating at times, it is beginning to move forward and he hopes it continues to do so.

Item 2. Preliminary Review of the Downtown Parking Plan

Mr. Raymond said we are beginning the kickoff in reviewing the entire parking system and program as a whole. He would like to see everyone take part with an open mind, without any preconceived notions on what can or cannot work, and he believes by engaging the community in enough discussion and by working hard, a solution can be reached. He said this is a large

undertaking, and Mayor-elect Kelly will formally kick it off at the upcoming City Commission meeting on January 5, 2016.

There was discussion about the major revenue loss from NEW, and the unanticipated cost of maintenance. Mr. Raymond said the parking program has never had a healthy fund reserve for things of this nature, and that will be one of the primary issues on which to focus; however, this problem is not just about revenue loss from NEW and deferred maintenance. A solution needs to be reached to make this program as a whole healthy and beneficial.

Item 3. Mayor-Elect Kelly's Invitation to City Commission Meeting 1.5.16

Mayor-elect Kelly said over the course of the next several months, at each City Commission meeting a particular advisory board will be invited to come to the meeting so that they may be publicly thanked for their service. He said he wanted to invite the Parking Advisory Commission first because parking is one of the biggest, most visible issues in the City, and the Commission's commitment to downtown includes what happens from a parking perspective. Commissioner Burow and Commissioner-elect Houck will be the liaisons in renovating the parking program, and will be attending Parking Advisory Commission meetings to show their support and advocacy of the program. Mayor-elect Kelly said that at the City Commission meeting on January 5, Commissioner Houck and Commissioner Burow will be tasking the Parking Advisory Commission to making a real effort and taking a look at everything on the table.

Mr. Burow said there had been discussion about having a test period of approximately three to six months where downtown parking meters are not used. He said meter complaints are something the City Commission hears constantly from the public; he doesn't expect positive results by suspending the meters, but it's something that may need to be tried. Though the downtown businesses appreciate the parking system currently, everything needs to be tested to see what will work. He said one of the things the Commissioners will be tasking the Parking Advisory Commission with is coming up with and trying new ideas, as trial is the only way to determine what will or will not work.

Mayor-elect Kelly said as long as there is effort and flexibility towards figuring out a solution, the end result will be relevant to the situation currently, and not based off what was tried ten years ago. He said the City Commission will want results, or at least the opportunity to try some new things in a timely manner. Mr. Fulcher asked if Mr. Kelly was going to be doing an introduction at the meeting on the 5th, or if he was expecting concrete ideas by then. Mr. Kelly said the meeting will be to task the Parking Advisory Commission. There was discussion with the PAC members on their ideas that have never seemed to go anywhere in previous years, and their appreciation that the City Commission and the Mayor-elect are interested and open to examining some of those ideas.

Mr. Volk said he liked the idea of having a pilot program that suspends meter utilization for three to six months, but asked if it had been suggested that they consider doing it for a longer period of time. His concern with doing it for a brief period of time is getting the appropriate marketing out for broad public awareness, and then being able to analyze the accuracy of the data collected on a short term basis. Mr. Kelly said that was a great question, and said the other thing to consider is how to deal with the loss of revenue for the longer period of time. He said all of these things are on the table, and he hopes that they can start implementing suggestions quickly.

Mr. Brown said Standard Parking has come in twice before, and people who professionally travel the United States to help communities with parking issues have presented suggestions

and provided reports on what could benefit the parking program. He said that information never went any further, but as the PAC, they could revisit some of those reports again. There was more discussion on ideas, and Mayor-elect Kelly excused himself from the rest of the PAC meeting, saying he hoped to see the PAC members at the City Commission meeting on the January 5.

Item 4. Budget Performance Report November 2015

Mr. Raymond said regarding the idea of meter suspension that he just wanted to give everyone an idea of the revenue meters generate. From July 1, 2015 through November 30, 2015, revenue from the meters alone was over \$99,000. He said in the future, the Budget Performance Report will be generated a little differently to show prior year-to-date totals, as opposed to the ending balance for the prior year.

Mr. Volk clarified that we would be losing \$99,000 for five months of meter suspension, and asked Mr. Raymond what we would be saving in expenses. Mr. Raymond said that if businesses want to keep the enforcement and generate that turnover, there is no savings. Ms. Grigsby explained the daily routine of lot enforcement versus meter enforcement; an hour to an hour-and-a-half in the mornings is spent collecting meters; afternoon collection for the lots takes 20 to 30 minutes. There is an attendant that checks the lots all day for enforcement, including some residential, and then two attendants are on street for meter enforcement. Mr. Raymond said the lot at the library is also enforced, but the Parking program only keeps half of the revenue; the library receives the other half.

There was discussion on the possibility of not enforcing meters in the future, and what other cities in Montana do for enforcement. Mr. Campbell said something to consider would be to separate out the maintenance from the enforcement and have a City-wide tax to maintain the facilities and a specified parking district to pay for enforcement. Mr. Brown also suggested hiring some part-time police officers for enforcement, which also provides a police presence downtown. Mr. Raymond said that it's very important to keep in mind cost; the cost to hire a police officer is much greater than the cost to have parking attendants. There was discussion about the cost of the Standard Parking contract, for which the City pays approximately \$26,000-\$27,000 a month, and more discussion on the possibility of options other than contracting with Standard Parking.

Mr. Volk asked Ms. Redeen to what extent the BID had discussed potentially contributing to patrolling, community policing, and/or parking. Ms. Redeen said there were many questions that would need to be answered before they could commit to anything. She said in many communities the BID does run parking; Helena is one of those communities and they have major issues. She said there are many models on how to run parking, and there was discussion on how different cities in Montana run their parking program. She also said financially, the BID is not fluid enough to run the current parking program, but she welcomes the BID to be included in any and all parking discussions and weigh their options.

Mr. Campbell said that for a frame of reference, he would like to ask Ms. Grigsby for a block by block revenue report again now that NEW is gone. The last report done was in 2010 for a week span in April, and there was discussion on what month this coming year would be the best time to conduct the reporting. Ms. Grigsby said she would prefer April again. There was more discussion on options other than contracting with Standard Parking.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Raymond said the Parking Advisory Commission may need to meet twice a month in the upcoming months if they want to have ideas for City Commission by March. He also said the regularly scheduled January and February meetings are both scheduled on a holiday; it was agreed to hold those meetings on January 11 and February 8. It was also agreed to decide at the January 11 meeting if they will need to meet more than once in the month.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Redeen said the planter discussed at the October 26 meeting is complete. She also wanted to make everyone aware that there is an entity tied to Passport Parking called Hotspot Merchant Solutions that has reached out to the Downtown Association to provide the downtown business owners with a means of validating parking. There was discussion on reviewing it further.

Mr. Raymond informed the Commission that the department is implementing new software for parking; the old software has caused revenue issues, consistency issues, and data reliability issues, causing the department to cease a certain amount of collections. The new software will be ready to go live March 1, which is when the existing contract will expire.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.