

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

Mayor Barnhart called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Councilor Fisher, Councilor King, Councilor Lovering, Councilor Piper, Councilor Robinson, Councilor Shepard, and Mayor Barnhart.

Also present: City Manager Nicosia, City Clerk Staland, City Attorney Breck, Police Chief Peters and Fire Chief Weeks.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Councilor Lovering made motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilor Piper and the motion carried.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CONSENT AGENDA: Councilor Robinson motioned to approve the consent agenda noting all claims appeared to be in order, seconded by Councilor Shepard with council voting as follows. Ayes: King, Lovering, Piper, Robinson, Shepard, Fisher, and Barnhart.

Approval of Claims - September 18, 2023 - \$400,465.36

Approval of Special Payroll Claims - September 5, 2023 - \$27,100.71

Approval of Payroll Claims, September 15, 2023 - \$160,332.58

Approval of Regular City Council Meeting Minutes - September 5, 2023

Approval of Space Usage Agreement, Flathead County and City - 911 Communications Facility and Authorize City Manager's Signature

PUBLIC PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - MT DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION

Bob Vosen, MDT Missoula District Administrator, and John Schmidt, MDT Kalispell Construction, are here this evening to answer council concerns.

John Schmidt gave a brief update on highway construction in the area. Councilor Shepard inquired about highway construction at Salmon Lake. Mr. Schmidt said they will start paving in October with hopes of getting two thirds complete and finishing the remainder next year, hopefully before July 4th.

Mr. Vosen said District 1 has been without a Transportation Commissioner for months and the governor has recently appointed Cody Schwartz as the new District 1 Transportation Commissioner. Mr. Schwartz will be a great addition to the team.

Mr. Vosen addressed concerns and questions from the Council:

1. Green left turn arrows at intersections – MDOT did a study of intersections at 206, 4th Ave. W., 6th Ave. W. and Meadow Lake and the results are currently being analyzed. Traffic volume and delays have to meet criteria to determine if a signal is warranted. If it is warranted, MDOT will have to figure out funding to order new heads to make it happen. There is a private development that triggered a review of the Hwy 2 and Meadow Lake intersection, and MDOT will be working with the developer on any needed improvements. Mr. Vosen said when a green turning signal is added it can delay traffic in other areas.

2. Stop light at truck route – Mr. Vosen said they will put in the request, but if they could get a letter from the City requesting the light would be beneficial.

3. Regarding reducing the speed limit on Hwy. 2 to 35 MPH from the existing 45 MPH and reducing the speed limit on the North Fork Road entering into the city limits - Mr. Vosen said the way speed limits work in Montana is clearly spelled out in MCA and that is for speed limits to be changed, MDT doesn't have the authority to do so, it lies with the Transportation Commission. MDT has to receive a letter of request to review the speed limit by the governing body, if it's in the county the letter needs to come from the County Commissioners. MDT will do a speed study on what the traffic conditions are and what travel speeds are currently. The study will be reviewed by MDT and then they submit a letter back to the city or county on the findings. At that point, MDT will ask that the city or county to take public comment and respond back to MDT. MDT will then send the information to the Transportation Commission. City Manager Nicosia asked Mr. Vosen if the process would take approximately one year. Mr. Vosen replied we have a small group that does it and it will take close to a year. Some cities hire an engineering company to do the speed study and we review the study. This may expedite the turnaround time.

4. Are there state funds available for the TA sidewalk project - Mr. Vosen said no, there are no funds available. The TA program is federal funding and the funding match (13.42%) comes from the local government; MDT doesn't have a pot of money to provide a match for the TA program. Nicosia said we are doing a right of way phase, which added \$15,000 to the city share and the project missed the September deadline to ensure construction in 2024 and will now not see construction until 2025.

5. Pedestrian crossings on Nucleus and how to make them more visible - Vosen said some intersections already have signs with lights; we could paint more blocks or shark teeth on the crosswalks. Sign saturation is a problem; we want to be cautious on to where we put them. Bulb outs can be effective in getting pedestrians further out. Some of your signs are obscured by trees, you could trim those back. You may look during heavy traffic season to have a flag canister at intersections. Mayor Barnhart said we noticed in some communities they have signs stating pedestrian crossing ahead, perhaps we can put one at the beginning of Nucleus Ave and near the Post Office. Vosen said it may be effective. Nicosia asked if you approve the center lane during the busy time and is it beneficial. Vosen said he is not sure if MDT has approved them or not. Mr. Schmidt suggested a cross walk on 7th Street. Vosen said he would look into getting a crosswalk there.

Mayor Barnhart inquired about the intersection on Hwy 40 and Hwy 2, as there is no turning lane on the north side. Mr. Vosen said MDT is looking at a multitude of intersections in the valley and that one is number seven on the list, so it is definitely on their radar.

Police Chief Peters said the "when flashing" sign on Hwy 2 just west of Hilltop blew off and has not been replaced. Vosen said he will check with maintenance.

Mr. Vosen said he hopes to check in with the council on a quarterly basis here forward.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS/PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Mayor Barnhart read the notice of hearing:

Notice of Public Hearing - Rocky Top Cabins, A Two-Lot Subdivision - October 16, 2023:

The Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board held a public hearing for the following item at their regular meeting on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 130 6th Street

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

West, Columbia Falls, Montana. The Columbia Falls City Council will hold a subsequent hearing on October 16, 2023, starting at 7:00 p.m. in the same location.

Rocky Top Cabins Subdivision – A Two Lot Subdivision: A request by Herbert Enterprises LLC to create a two-lot subdivision. The property is 8.11 acres in size and the property is zoned CR-1 which allows a minimum lot size of one acre. The property is located at 269 Rocky Lane, Columbia Falls, and is described as Assessor's Tract 1 (Parcel A of COS 21669) located in Section 7, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County.

NEW BUSINESS:

Approval of LWCF Pre-Application - Fenholt Park Skatepark and Bathroom

City Manager said council has previously agreed to work with the Badrock Skatepark Association to submit a joint application to incorporate a bathroom at Fenholt Park. The deadline for pre-submittal is October 2nd. Council will adopt a resolution authorizing the application if the City/Badrock Skatepark Association are selected to proceed. The estimated cost of the Skatepark including the bathroom is between \$690,000 - \$715,000. This will be a competitive application, said Nicosia and staff recommends approval.

Councilor Fisher motioned to authorize the pre-application, seconded by Councilor Shepard with council voting as follows. Ayes: Lovering, Piper, Robinson, Shepard, Fisher, King, and Barnhart.

Capital Outlay Review and Approval - Fire Department

Fire Chief Weeks and City Manager Nicosia presented the Capital Outlay Needs for the Fire Department, 5-year, 20-year, and future.

This is the first in the series of detailed Capital Outlay Review for the City Council said Nicosia. City Manager Nicosia and Fire Chief Weeks discussed the Fire Department needs to include building, vehicles, and equipment. The main apparatus were discussed. The 2012 pumper was the City's first shared purchase with the Rural Fire District at \$321,000. The suggested replacement of this vehicle is fifteen to twenty years, and the estimated cost is \$700,000. The 2001 457 Rescue truck was \$227,000 when purchased and the replacement cost is nearly \$600,000. We are considering replacing this vehicle in 2024/2025.

431 is the oldest engine, a 1994 HME, slated for replacement in 2024/2025. There is a pumper rescue engine that could replace 457 and 431 for an estimated cost of \$700,000. The city share of the engine would be \$275,000 and the rural share would be \$425,000 based on 2023 taxable valuations and 2023 FY call counts. Chief Weeks believes the can surplus 457 to put toward the new engine.

The 2002 ladder truck was also a joint purchase with the Rural Department for \$132,000. and the replacement cost is \$1.2 million, the City would replace it after 2027.

The 2014 Ford F150 is the command vehicle purchased for \$47,000; replacement would be in 2029/2034.

Our utility truck is a 2010 Ford F150 was \$33,000. Replacement for this vehicle will be in 2030.

Nicosia and Weeks reviewed all of the large equipment items including washers, hose dryer, cascade system as well as large volume purchases such as radios and SCBA's. Nicosia noted that the Council will receive a formal Capital Outlay Report for adoption at a later date.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor King expressed concern over people living in the parking lot at the old Burger King. Nicosia said they have been asked to vacate the property and are now gone.

Councilor Shepard said he is concerned with high-speed traffic on Hwy 2. Chief Peters said they are consistently pulling folks over for speeding.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

Councilor Lovering asked if we are addressing Mrs. Darling's letter to the council on the park. Nicosia replied yes, we are acting on it.

Mayor Barnhart asked if the city is working on getting rip rap along the riverbank at River's Edge Park. Nicosia replied we have to adopt the County-wide pre-mitigation plan and then we can start the project.

Mayor said he visited River's Edge Park and there was a hammock, backpack, and someone in the hammock. What prevents people from staying there all night? Nicosia said the city parks are patrolled nightly and we encourage people to report such activity to us so we may respond appropriately.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

Nicosia reminded interested council members to register for the MT League of Cities and Towns conference.

MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS

Fire Chief Weeks filled council in on what the career firefighter/EMT's do on a daily basis as previously requested by Councilor Fisher. Weeks noted the response time is much quicker with career staff. When not on a call they maintain engines, inventory engines, hydrant maintenance, mowing at the rural fire hall and city department, conduct weekly training, attend training classes when needed, and fire inspections. Chief Weeks said they are busy with the call volume and other duties.

Police Chief Peters said the new Police charger is on the road. Car #22 was wiped out on a traffic stop and is out of commission. Chief Peters reported that Officer Vinny Smith is back with the department as a Patrolman and he is already certified. Chief Peters said the department is fully staffed with officers but down a Detective and one Sergeant. The Department is extremely busy with the amount of traffic during the summer season, and the call volume is up, and the officers are busy said Peters.

ADJOURN – Meeting duly adjourned at 8:32 P.M.

Mayor

Attest:

City Clerk