



Special Work Session Meeting Agenda
2 Park Drive South, Great Falls, MT
Commission Chambers
July 22, 2025
5:30 PM

Revised with Packet Details

The agenda packet material is available on the City's website: <https://greatfallsmt.net/meetings>. The Public may view and listen to the meeting on government access channel City-190, cable channel 190; or online at <https://greatfallsmt.net/livestream>.

Public participation is welcome in the following ways:

- Attend in person.
- Provide public comments in writing by 12:00 PM the day of the meeting: Mail to City Clerk, PO Box 5021, Great Falls, MT 59403, or via email to: commission@greatfallsmt.net. Include the agenda item or agenda item number in the subject line, and include the name of the commenter and either an address or whether the commenter is a city resident. Written communication received by that time will be shared with the City Commission and appropriate City staff for consideration during the agenda item, and, will be so noted in the official record of the meeting.

Meeting Decorum Statement

1. Members of the public shall address their comments to the presiding officer and the Commission as a body and not to any individual member of the Commission or City staff.
2. Speakers shall keep their comments germane to the subject item on the agenda or, during petitions and communications, matters of significant public interest which are within the jurisdiction of the Commission.
3. Be respectful and do not engage in disorderly or boisterous conduct, including but not limited to applause, booing, or making any remarks that are, threatening, profane, abusive, personal, or slanderous that disturbs, disrupts, or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of our meeting.
4. Signs, placards, banners, or other similar items shall not be permitted in the audience during our City Commission meeting.
5. Remain seated, unless addressing the body at the podium or entering or leaving the meeting. Private or informal conversations may occur outside of the Chambers. Obey any lawful order of the Presiding Officer to enforce the Rules of Decorum.

A complete copy of Rule 10 pertaining to the public participation is available on the table in the Commission Chambers and is included with the Meeting posting on the City's Website.

CALL TO ORDER

PUBLIC COMMENT

(Public comment on agenda items or any matter that is within the jurisdiction of the City Commission. Please keep your remarks to a maximum of five (5) minutes. Speak into the microphone, and state your name and either your address or whether you are a city resident for the record.)

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. City Commission Discussion on Potential Fireworks Restrictions. (Continued from 7/15/25 Work Session)
 - a. Option 1 – prohibit the sale and/or discharge of fireworks within city limits, except in connection with authorized public displays.

- b. Option 2 - Revise the definition of “permissible fireworks”, limiting allowable fireworks for sale and discharge to novelty or ground devices, except in authorized and permitted public displays.
- c. Option 3 - Revise the definition of “permissible fireworks”, limiting allowable fireworks for sale and discharge. Fireworks to be prohibited: 1) Fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets; and 2) fireworks that explode, such as salutes and firecrackers. Permitted fireworks typically include sparklers, fountains, ground spinners, snap caps, smoke devices, and novelty items. except in authorized and permitted public displays.
- d. Option 4 – Other Options as proposed by Commission during the work session

Additional Attachments:

July 8, 2025, Email and Memo from Manager Doyon

ChatGPT – Great Falls Fireworks Bans and Regulations: A Historical Overview

Memo from Chief Newton – Police Chief’s responses to fireworks questions

Costs for Additional enforcement

Historical Timeline for Great Falls Fireworks Regulation

ADJOURNMENT

Draft Option 1

RESOLUTION **

A RESOLUTION REFERRING ORDINANCE *** —AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS TO PROHIBIT THE SALE AND/OR DISCHARGE OF FIREWORKS WITHIN THE INCORPORATED CITY LIMITS OF GREAT FALLS, EXCEPT IN CONNECTION WITH AUTHORIZED PUBLIC DISPLAYS—TO A VOTE OF THE PEOPLE AT AN ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 4, 2025**

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls, Montana, established a charter form of government in 1986 with self-governing powers in accordance with Article XI, Section 5, of the Constitution of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls is authorized by its Charter and Montana law to establish laws to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Great Falls; and

WHEREAS, Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-4206 specifically reserves to the City of Great Falls the “power to regulate or prohibit the ... the explosion, use, or selling of fireworks, firecrackers, torpedoes, other pyrotechnics, or toy pistols or guns within the city....;” and

WHEREAS, Whereas, the City Commission has received support from community members urging the City to prohibit the sale and discharge of fireworks within the incorporated City limits, except as part of authorized and permitted public displays; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members requesting that the City continue to allow the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law; and

WHEREAS, Mon. Code Ann. § 7-5-132, MCA allows the City Commission to refer a proposed ordinance prohibiting the sale and discharge of fireworks except as part of authorized and permitted public displays, to a vote of the electors of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA:

1. **REFERENCE:** The City Commission of the City of Great Falls has proposed an ordinance amending Title 9, Chapter 9 of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls to prohibit the sale and/or discharge of fireworks, except in

Draft Option 1

authorized public displays within the City of Great Falls, and hereby refers the proposed ordinance to a vote of the people at a municipal election to be held on November 4, 2025. A full copy of the proposed ordinance is attached hereto, marked as Attachment “1,” and by this reference made a part hereof.

2. **FORM OF BALLOT:** The form of the ballot shall be as provided by law and as follows:

Statement of Purpose and Implication: This ballot measure asks voters to approve or disapprove an amendment to the Official Code of the City of Great Falls that would prohibit the sale and/or discharge of fireworks within city limits, except in connection with authorized public displays.

This measure is intended to address public safety, fire risk, noise concerns, and impacts on veterans, pets, and vulnerable residents. If passed, the ordinance would be enforceable by the City and includes penalties for violations.

Proposal: The City Commission of the City of Great Falls has proposed an amendment to Title 9, Chapter 9 of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls, prohibiting the sale and/or discharge of fireworks within the incorporated City limits, except in connection with authorized public displays.

[] **FOR** amending the Official Code of the City of Great Falls to specifically prohibit the sale and/or discharge of fireworks within the incorporated City limits, except in connection with authorized public displays.

[] **AGAINST** amending the Official Code of the City of Great Falls to specifically prohibit the sale and/or discharge of fireworks within the incorporated City limits, except in connection with authorized public displays.

3. **CERTIFICATION:** The City Clerk shall certify this Resolution and attached proposed Ordinance amendment to the Cascade County Election Official as provided by law.

4. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** This Resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED BY SAID CITY COMMISSION that this Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its passage and approval.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, on July ____, 2025.

Draft Option 1

Cory Reeves, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David G. Dennis, City Attorney

Draft Option 1

ATTACHMENT “1”

Draft Option 1

ORDINANCE ****

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING TITLE 9, CHAPTER 9, SECTION 030, OF THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS (OCCGF) TO LIMIT PERMISSIBLE FIREWORKS FOR SALE AND DISCHARGE

* * * * *

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls, Montana, established a charter form of government in 1986 with self-governing powers in accordance with Article XI, Section 5, of the Constitution of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls is authorized by its Charter and Montana law to establish laws to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Great Falls; and

WHEREAS, Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-4206 specifically reserves to the City of Great Falls the “power to regulate or prohibit the ... the explosion, use, or selling of fireworks, firecrackers, torpedoes, other pyrotechnics, or toy pistols or guns within the city...;” and

WHEREAS, Whereas, the City Commission has received support from community members urging the City to prohibit the sale and discharge of fireworks within the incorporated City limits, except as part of authorized and permitted public displays; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members requesting that the City continue to allow the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law; and

WHEREAS, Mon. Code Ann. § 7-5-132, MCA allows the City Commission to refer a proposed ordinance amending OCCGF Title 9, Chapter 9 to prohibit the sale and/or discharge of fireworks except as part authorized public displays, to a vote of the electors of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA, CONDITIONED UPON APPROVAL BY A VOTE OF THE ELECTORS OF THE CITY:

Section 1. The provisions of OCCGF Title 9, Chapter 9, Section 030, are hereby proposed to be amended as depicted by Exhibit “A” attached hereto and by reference incorporated herein with deleted language identified by ~~strikeout~~ and inserted language **bolded**; and

Section 2. This proposed ordinance shall be in full force and effect immediately upon certification by the Cascade County Election Administrator of an election result showing that a majority of the electors of the City of Great Falls voting in the election to be conducted on November 4, 2025 have voted in favor of this proposed ordinance. In the event that the Cascade County Election Administrator certifies an election result showing

Draft Option 1

that a majority of the electors of the City of Great Falls voting in that election have voted against this proposed ordinance, this ordinance shall be null, void and of no legal force or effect.

REFERRED TO THE VOTERS via Resolution _____ by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, this _____ day of _____, 2025.

Cory Reeves, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David G. Dennis, City Attorney

Draft Option 1
Ordinance ** Exhibit "A"**

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

Chapter 9 - FIREWORKS Chapter 9 - FIREWORKS

Sections:

~~9.9.010 – Selling and discharging~~

~~dates and times.~~

- ~~A. The selling and discharging of fireworks within the incorporated limits of Great Falls shall be July 2, through July 4, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. (Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. 2664, 1994).~~
- ~~B. Fireworks may be discharged on December 31, from 10:00 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. January 1. Fireworks may not be sold within the incorporated city limits except as provided in 9.9.010(A).~~
- ~~C. The Fire Chief, or designee, shall determine if there are special circumstances that warrant the discharge of fireworks which are not provided for in 9.9.010(A) and (B), and authorize such use if the circumstance benefits the community and is of national, state and local significance.~~
- ~~D. Professional Fireworks Displays using display fireworks. Public displays of fireworks by a licensed, bonded pyrotechnic operator are exempt from 9.9.010(A)-(C). Permits for any public display by a licensed bonded pyrotechnic operator from the Fire Department are required to conduct a public fireworks display. "Display Fireworks" means an aerial shell, salute, flash shell, comet, sky battle, mine, and any similar 1.3g (display fireworks) and 1.4g (consumer fireworks) explosive as defined by the U.S. Department of Transportation in Part 173, Title 49, Code of Federal Regulations.~~
- ~~E. The City Manager may, after consultation with the Fire Chief, issue an emergency declaration banning the discharge of any fireworks during any portion of the period specified in Section 9.9.010(A) if, in the judgment of the Fire Chief, the discharge of fireworks poses a significant danger to public safety due to adverse weather conditions such as drought, winds, and/or extreme heat, and that the conditions warrant issuance of an emergency proclamation.~~

~~(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. 2664, 1994).~~

~~9.9.010 – Possession illegal.~~

Draft Option 1
Ordinance ** Exhibit "A"**

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

- A. ~~Possession of fireworks not allowed to be sold or discharged by the State of Montana shall be illegal. (Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. 2664, 1994).~~
- B. ~~It shall be unlawful for any parent, guardian, or custodian of any child, who is less than ten (10) years of age, to allow said child, to possess or discharge any fireworks as defined herein, unless that parent, guardian or custodian be in direct supervision of the child at the time of discharge. For purposes of 9.9.020(B) "direct supervision" means the overall direction and control of an individual and requires the individual furnishing direct supervision to be present and immediately available to furnish assistance while he or she is in possession of, or is discharging, any and all fireworks. Direct supervision also requires the individual directly supervising to control the application of flame or other means of discharge of the firework and must be no greater than ten (10) feet away from the individual being directly supervised at time of the firework's discharge.~~

~~(Ord., 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)~~

9.9.03~~10~~ - Permissible fireworks.

Only those fireworks authorized by state law are permissible.

- A. **The sale and/or discharge of fireworks, as defined in Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-101, is prohibited within the City of Great Falls incorporated limits.**
- B. **Professional Fireworks Displays. Public displays of fireworks by a licensed, bonded pyrotechnic operator are exempt from 9.9.010(A). Permits for any public display by a licensed bonded pyrotechnic operator from the Fire Department are required to conduct a public fireworks display.**

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)

9.9.04~~0~~ - Littering illegal.

~~It shall be illegal for anyone to leave debris from discharged fireworks on any public place including but not limited to parks, sidewalks, streets, and alleys, or on private property not owned by the individual discharging the fireworks.~~

~~(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)~~

9.9.05~~20~~ - Enforcement.

- A. City Police Officers and Firefighters shall enforce these rules and regulations.
- B. Any official charged with enforcing these rules and regulations may;

Draft Option 1
Ordinance ** Exhibit “A”**

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

1. Issue a Notice to Appear to Great Falls Municipal Court for violations of this Chapter;
 2. Seize illegal fireworks that are offered for sale, sold, or in the possession of any individual in violations of this Chapter; and
 - ~~3. Recommend to the Planning and Community Development Department that any wholesaler/retailer found in violation of this chapter have his/her permit revoked.~~
- C. Any person who violates these rules and regulations shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to the following fines: (Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2664, 1994).
1. 1st Offense—One hundred dollars (\$100.00).
 2. 2nd Offense—Two hundred dollars (\$200.00).
 3. 3rd Offense—Three hundred dollars (\$300.00).
 4. 4th and higher—One thousand dollars (\$1,000.00).

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. No. 3057, § 1, 8-17-2010)

~~9.9.060 – Fireworks prohibited on all public property.~~

~~Subject to the exceptions provided in 9.9.010(C), fireworks may not be discharged in any city park or on any public sidewalk, street, public right-of-way, public easement or alley.~~

~~(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. 2664, 1994).~~

~~9.9.070 – Fireworks stands and permit fees.~~

- A. ~~Persons, groups, or organizations wishing to sell fireworks within the incorporated boundaries of the City of Great Falls shall obtain a special permit. The fees collected from the permit shall cover the costs to issue said permit; to inspect the fireworks stands; and costs of enforcement.~~
- B. ~~Operators of fireworks stands shall educate all patrons on the:~~
- ~~1. Legal, safe use of fireworks;~~
 - ~~2. The dates and times allowed for fireworks to be discharged; and~~
 - ~~3. The requirement to clean up all debris left from discharged fireworks.~~
- C. ~~Fireworks stand permit fees are based upon square footage as follows:~~
-

Draft Option 1
Ordinance ** Exhibit "A"**

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. 2664, 1994).

SIZE	FEES
0 — 300 sq. ft.	\$125.00
301 — 1,000 sq. ft.	\$375.00
1,001 — 2,000 sq. ft.	\$625.00
2,001 — 3,000 sq. ft.	\$875.00
3,001 sq. ft. or larger	\$1,125.00

Ordinance – Fireworks Prohibited Except Public Displays

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

Chapter 9 - FIREWORKS

9.9.010 - Permissible fireworks.

- A. The sale and/or discharge of fireworks, as defined in Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-101, is prohibited within the City of Great Falls incorporated limits.
- B. Professional Fireworks Displays. Public displays of fireworks by a licensed, bonded pyrotechnic operator are exempt from 9.9.010(A). Permits for any public display by a licensed bonded pyrotechnic operator from the Fire Department are required to conduct a public fireworks display.

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. ****, 2025)

9.9.020 - Enforcement.

- A. City Police Officers and Firefighters shall enforce these rules and regulations.
- B. Any official charged with enforcing these rules and regulations may;
 - 1. Issue a Notice to Appear to Great Falls Municipal Court for violations of this Chapter;
 - 2. Seize illegal fireworks that are offered for sale, sold, or in the possession of any individual in violations of this Chapter; and
- C. Any person who violates these rules and regulations shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to the following fines: (Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2664, 1994).
 - 1. 1st Offense—One hundred dollars (\$100.00).
 - 2. 2nd Offense—Two hundred dollars (\$200.00).
 - 3. 3rd Offense—Three hundred dollars (\$300.00).
 - 4. 4th and higher—One thousand dollars (\$1,000.00).

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. No. 3057, § 1, 8-17-2010; Ord. ****, 2025)

Draft Option 2

RESOLUTION **

A RESOLUTION REFERRING ORDINANCE ***, AN
ORDINANCE AMENDING THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY
OF GREAT FALLS TO LIMIT THE SALE AND USE OF
CONSUMER FIREWORKS WITHIN THE INCORPORATED CITY
LIMITS OF GREAT FALLS, TO A VOTE OF THE PEOPLE AT AN
ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 4, 2025**

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls, Montana, established a charter form of government in 1986 with self-governing powers in accordance with Article XI, Section 5, of the Constitution of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls is authorized by its Charter and Montana law to establish laws to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Great Falls; and

WHEREAS, Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-4206 specifically reserves to the City of Great Falls the “power to regulate or prohibit the ... the explosion, use, or selling of fireworks, firecrackers, torpedoes, other pyrotechnics, or toy pistols or guns within the city....;” and

WHEREAS, since 1985, the Official Code of the City of Great Falls (OCCGF) has permitted the sale and discharge, within City limits, of all fireworks permitted by Mont. Code Ann. §50-37-101 (MCA); and

WHEREAS, prior to 2021, permissible fireworks as defined by Mont. Code Ann. §50-37-101, excluded “sky rockets, roman candles, and bottle rockets;” and

WHEREAS, in 2021, the Montana legislature changed the definition of permissible fireworks in § 50-37-101 MCA to include all “consumer fireworks” including aerial fireworks;

WHEREAS, beginning in 2021 and continuing thereafter, the City has received significantly more calls to its emergency dispatch system regarding fireworks; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has received support from community members urging the City to limit the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law within the incorporated City limits; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members requesting that the City continue to allow the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law; and

Draft Option 2

WHEREAS, Mon. Code Ann. § 7-5-132, MCA allows the City Commission to refer a proposed ordinance limiting the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law to a vote of the electors of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question of whether to limit the sale and use of fireworks within the incorporated City limits to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA:

1. **REFERENCE:** The City Commission of the City of Great Falls has proposed an ordinance amending Section 9.9.030 of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls to revise the definition of “permissible fireworks,” limiting allowable fireworks for sale and discharge to novelty or ground devices, except in authorized and permitted public displays within the City of Great Falls, and hereby refers the proposed ordinance to a vote of the people at a municipal election to be held on November 4, 2025. A full copy of the proposed ordinance is attached hereto, marked as Attachment “1,” and by this reference made a part hereof.
2. **FORM OF BALLOT:** The form of the ballot shall be as provided by law and as follows:

Statement of Purpose and Implication: This ballot measure asks voters to approve or disapprove an amendment to the Official Code of the City of Great Falls that would prohibit the sale and/or discharge, within City limits, of aerial fireworks such as shells, rockets, cakes, Roman candles, and similar items. The ordinance would continue to allow the use of all other consumer fireworks permitted by § 50-37-101 MCA.

This measure is intended to address public safety, fire risk, noise concerns, and impacts on veterans, pets, and vulnerable residents, while still permitting personal celebration with low-risk fireworks. If passed, the ordinance would be enforceable by the City and include penalties for violations.

Proposal: The City Commission of the City of Great Falls has proposed an amendment to Section 9.9.030 of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls, to limit the type of permissible fireworks allowed to be sold or discharged within the incorporated City limits. The amended Section 9.9.030 is shown below, with proposed deleted language in strikeout and inserted language in bold:

9.9.030 Permissible fireworks.

~~Only those fireworks authorized by state law are permissible.~~

Draft Option 2

- A. Fireworks permitted to be sold and discharged within City's municipal limits are those allowed by Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-105 (2025), except that fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets are strictly prohibited.
- B. No other fireworks are permitted to be sold and discharged within the city limits under this Chapter, except in city-approved and permitted public displays.

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)

[] YES on Ballot Issue _____, Number _____.

[] NO on Ballot Issue _____, Number _____.

- 3. **CERTIFICATION:** The City Clerk shall certify this Resolution and attached proposed Ordinance amendment to the Cascade County Election Official as provided by law.
- 4. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** This Resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED BY SAID CITY COMMISSION that this Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its passage and approval.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, on July ____, 2025.

Cory Reeves, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David G. Dennis, City Attorney

Draft Option 2

ATTACHMENT “1”

Draft Option 2

ORDINANCE _____

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING TITLE 9, CHAPTER 9, SECTION 030, OF THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS (OCCGF) TO LIMIT PERMISSIBLE FIREWORKS FOR SALE AND DISCHARGE

* * * * *

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls, Montana, established a charter form of government in 1986 with self-governing powers in accordance with Article XI, Section 5, of the Constitution of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls is authorized by its Charter and Montana law to establish laws to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Great Falls; and

WHEREAS, Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-4206 specifically reserves to the City of Great Falls the “power to regulate or prohibit the ... the explosion, use, or selling of fireworks, firecrackers, torpedoes, other pyrotechnics, or toy pistols or guns within the city....;” and

WHEREAS, since 1985, the Official Code of the City of Great Falls (OCCGF) has permitted the sale and discharge, within City limits, of all fireworks permitted by Mont. Code Ann. §50-37-101 (MCA); and

WHEREAS, prior to 2021, permissible fireworks as defined by Mont. Code Ann. §50-37-101, excluded “sky rockets, roman candles, and bottle rockets;” and

WHEREAS, in 2021, the Montana legislature changed the definition of permissible fireworks in § 50-37-101 MCA, to include all “consumer fireworks” including aerial fireworks;

WHEREAS, beginning in 2021 and continuing thereafter, the City has received significantly more calls to its emergency dispatch system regarding fireworks; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has received support from community members urging the City to limit the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law within the incorporated City limits; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members requesting that the City continue to allow the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law; and

WHEREAS, Mon. Code Ann. § 7-5-132, MCA allows the City Commission to refer a proposed ordinance limiting the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law to a vote of the electors of the City; and

Draft Option 2

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question of whether to limit the sale and use of fireworks within the incorporated City limits to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA, CONDITIONED UPON APPROVAL BY A VOTE OF THE ELECTORS OF THE CITY:

Section 1. The provisions of OCCGF Title 9, Chapter 9, Section 030, are hereby proposed to be amended as depicted by Exhibit “A” attached hereto and by reference incorporated herein with deleted language identified by ~~strikeout~~ and inserted language **bolded**; and

Section 2. This proposed ordinance shall be in full force and effect immediately upon certification by the Cascade County Election Administrator of an election result showing that a majority of the electors of the City of Great Falls voting in the election to be conducted on November 4, 2025 have voted in favor of this proposed ordinance. In the event that the Cascade County Election Administrator certifies an election result showing that a majority of the electors of the City of Great Falls voting in that election have voted against this proposed ordinance, this ordinance shall be null, void and of no legal force or effect.

REFERRED TO THE VOTERS via Resolution _____ by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, this _____ day of _____, 2025.

Cory Reeves, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David G. Dennis, City Attorney

Draft Option 2

Ordinance ** Exhibit “A”**

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

9.9.030 Permissible fireworks.

~~Only those fireworks authorized by state law are permissible.~~

- A. Fireworks permitted to be sold and discharged within City’s municipal limits are those allowed by Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-105 (2025), except that fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets are strictly prohibited.**
- B. No other fireworks are permitted to be sold and discharged within the city limits under this Chapter, except in city-approved and permitted public displays.**

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)

Draft Option 2

Ordinance Prohibiting Aerial Fireworks

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

9.9.030 Permissible fireworks.

- A. Fireworks permitted to be sold and discharged within City's municipal limits are those allowed by Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-105 (2025), except that fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets are strictly prohibited.
- B. No other fireworks are permitted to be sold and/or discharged within the city limits under this Chapter, except in city-approved and permitted public displays.

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. ****; 2025)

Montana Code Annotated 2023

TITLE 50. HEALTH AND SAFETY

CHAPTER 37. FIREWORKS

Part 1. General Provisions

Permissible Fireworks

50-37-105. Permissible fireworks. Permissible fireworks include and are limited to those that meet the definition of consumer fireworks as provided in 27 CFR 555.11 and that comply with the construction, chemical composition, and labeling regulations of the U.S. consumer product safety commission, as set forth in 16 CFR, parts 1500 and 1507.

History: En. Sec. 2, Ch. 143, L. 1947; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 136, L. 1957; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 273, L. 1959; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 107, L. 1961; amd. Sec. 14, Ch. 423, L. 1971; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 79, L. 1974; amd. Sec. 17, Ch. 187, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 69-2701(4); amd. Sec. 3, Ch. 598, L. 1985; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 68, L. 2021.

Draft Option 3

RESOLUTION **

A RESOLUTION REFERRING ORDINANCE ***, AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS TO LIMIT THE SALE AND USE OF CONSUMER FIREWORKS WITHIN THE INCORPORATED CITY LIMITS OF GREAT FALLS, TO A VOTE OF THE PEOPLE AT AN ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 4, 2025**

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls, Montana, established a charter form of government in 1986 with self-governing powers in accordance with Article XI, Section 5, of the Constitution of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls is authorized by its Charter and Montana law to establish laws to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Great Falls; and

WHEREAS, Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-4206 specifically reserves to the City of Great Falls the “power to regulate or prohibit the ... the explosion, use, or selling of fireworks, firecrackers, torpedoes, other pyrotechnics, or toy pistols or guns within the city....;” and

WHEREAS, Whereas, the City Commission has received support from community members urging the City to limit the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law within the incorporated City limits; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members requesting that the City continue to allow the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law; and

WHEREAS, Mon. Code Ann. § 7-5-132, MCA allows the City Commission to refer a proposed ordinance limiting the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law to a vote of the electors of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question of whether to limit the sale and use of fireworks within the incorporated City limits to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA:

1. **REFERENCE:** The City Commission of the City of Great Falls has proposed an ordinance amending Section 9.9.030 of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls to revise the definition of “permissible fireworks,” limiting

Draft Option 3

allowable fireworks for sale and discharge to novelty or ground devices, except in authorized and permitted public displays within the City of Great Falls, and hereby refers the proposed ordinance to a vote of the people at a municipal election to be held on November 4, 2025. A full copy of the proposed ordinance is attached hereto, marked as Attachment “1,” and by this reference made a part hereof.

2. **FORM OF BALLOT:** The form of the ballot shall be as provided by law and as follows:

Statement of Purpose and Implication: This ballot measure asks voters to approve or disapprove an amendment to the Official Code of the City of Great Falls that would restrict the use, sale, and discharge of certain fireworks within city limits. The proposed ordinance would prohibit the use of aerial and explosive devices such as shells, rockets, cakes, Roman candles, salutes, firecrackers, and similar items. The ordinance would continue to allow the use of novelty and other consumer fireworks—such as sparklers, fountains, snakes, and other non-explosive, non-aerial fireworks.

This measure is intended to address public safety, fire risk, noise concerns, and impacts on veterans, pets, and vulnerable residents, while still permitting personal celebration with low-risk fireworks. If passed, the ordinance would be enforceable by the City and include penalties for violations.

Proposal: The City Commission of the City of Great Falls has proposed an amendment to Section 9.9.030 of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls, to limit the type of permissible fireworks allowed to be sold or discharged within the incorporated City limits. The amended Section 9.9.030 is shown below, with proposed deleted language in strikeout and inserted language in bold:

9.9.030 Permissible fireworks.

~~Only those fireworks authorized by state law are permissible.~~

- A. **Fireworks permitted to be sold and discharged are limited to those allowed by Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-105 (2025), except that the following fireworks are strictly prohibited:**
 - 1) **fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets; and**
 - 2) **fireworks that explode, such as salutes and firecrackers. Permitted fireworks typically include sparklers, fountains, ground spinners, snap caps, smoke devices, and novelty items.**
- B. **Other fireworks are not permitted to be sold and discharged within the city limits under this Chapter, except in city-approved and permitted public displays.**

Draft Option 3

C.

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)

[] **YES** on Ballot Issue _____, Number _____.

[] **NO** on Ballot Issue _____, Number _____.

3. **CERTIFICATION:** The City Clerk shall certify this Resolution and attached proposed Ordinance amendment to the Cascade County Election Official as provided by law.

4. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** This Resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED BY SAID CITY COMMISSION that this Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its passage and approval.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, on July ____, 2025.

Cory Reeves, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David G. Dennis, City Attorney

ATTACHMENT “1”

Draft Option 3

ORDINANCE _____

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING TITLE 9, CHAPTER 9, SECTION 030, OF THE OFFICIAL CODE OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS (OCCGF) TO LIMIT PERMISSIBLE FIREWORKS FOR SALE AND DISCHARGE

* * * * *

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls, Montana, established a charter form of government in 1986 with self-governing powers in accordance with Article XI, Section 5, of the Constitution of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the City of Great Falls is authorized by its Charter and Montana law to establish laws to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Great Falls; and

WHEREAS, Montana Code Annotated § 7-33-4206 specifically reserves to the City of Great Falls the “power to regulate or prohibit the ... the explosion, use, or selling of fireworks, firecrackers, torpedoes, other pyrotechnics, or toy pistols or guns within the city....;” and

WHEREAS, Whereas, the City Commission has received support from community members urging the City to limit the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law within the incorporated City limits; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has also received opposition from community members requesting that the City continue to allow the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law; and

WHEREAS, Mon. Code Ann. § 7-5-132, MCA allows the City Commission to refer a proposed ordinance limiting the sale and use of fireworks otherwise permitted under state law to a vote of the electors of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question of whether to limit the sale and use of fireworks within the incorporated City limits to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

WHEREAS, the City Commission now wishes to submit the question of whether to amend OCCGF Title 9 to limit the types of permitted fireworks within the City of Great Falls to a vote of the electors of the City to be conducted on November 4, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA, CONDITIONED UPON APPROVAL BY A VOTE OF THE ELECTORS OF THE CITY:

Draft Option 3

Section 1. The provisions of OCCGF Title 9, Chapter 9, Section 030, are hereby proposed to be amended as depicted by Exhibit “A” attached hereto and by reference incorporated herein with deleted language identified by ~~strikeout~~ and inserted language **bolded**; and

Section 2. This proposed ordinance shall be in full force and effect immediately upon certification by the Cascade County Election Administrator of an election result showing that a majority of the electors of the City of Great Falls voting in the election to be conducted on November 4, 2025 have voted in favor of this proposed ordinance. In the event that the Cascade County Election Administrator certifies an election result showing that a majority of the electors of the City of Great Falls voting in that election have voted against this proposed ordinance, this ordinance shall be null, void and of no legal force or effect.

REFERRED TO THE VOTERS via Resolution _____ by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, this _____ day of _____, 2025.

Cory Reeves, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David G. Dennis, City Attorney

Draft Option 3

Ordinance **** Exhibit “A”

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

9.9.030 Permissible fireworks.

~~Only those fireworks authorized by state law are permissible.~~

- A. Fireworks permitted to be sold and discharged are limited to those allowed by Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-105 (2025), except that the following fireworks are strictly prohibited: 1) fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets; and 2) fireworks that explode, such as salutes and firecrackers. Permitted fireworks typically include sparklers, fountains, ground spinners, snap caps, smoke devices, and novelty items.**
- B. Other fireworks are not permitted to be sold and discharged within the city limits under this Chapter, except in city-approved and permitted public displays.**

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007)

Ordinance Prohibiting Aerial and Exploding Fireworks

Title 9 – PUBLIC PEACE, MORALS AND WELFARE

9.9.030 Permissible fireworks.

- A. Fireworks permitted to be sold and discharged are limited to those allowed by Mont. Code Ann. § 50-37-105 (2025), except that the following fireworks are strictly prohibited: 1) fireworks designed to leave the ground, such as sky rockets, shells, cakes, missiles, roman candles, and bottle rockets; and 2) fireworks that explode, such as salutes and firecrackers. Permitted fireworks typically include sparklers, fountains, ground spinners, snap caps, smoke devices, and novelty items.
- B. Other fireworks are not permitted to be sold and discharged within the city limits under this Chapter, except in city-approved and permitted public displays.

(Ord. 3158, 2017; Ord. 2965, 2007; Ord. ****, 2025)

RE: Discussion about Fireworks

From Greg Doyon <gdoyon@greatfallsmt.net>

Date Tue 7/8/2025 4:29 PM

To Rick Tryon <rtryon@greatfallsmt.net>; Cory Reeves <creeves@greatfallsmt.net>; Joe McKenney <jmckenney@greatfallsmt.net>; Shannon Wilson <swilson@greatfallsmt.net>; Susan Wolff <swolff@greatfallsmt.net>

Cc Jeremy Jones <jjones@greatfallsmt.net>; Jeff Newton <jnewton@greatfallsmt.net>; David Dennis <ddennis@greatfallsmt.net>; Bryan Lockerby <blockerby@greatfallsmt.net>

 1 attachment (595 KB)

CC - Fireworks Options - July 8, 2025.doc.pdf;

Mayor Reeves and Commissioners:

We've collected a good amount of initial information for the Commission to review prior to the work session. I've attached a memorandum, detailing the process to adopt an ordinance, or sending the question to the voters on a ballot question.

Most of Commissioner Tryon's questions are answered below. I'm thinking we have enough preliminary information on the topic to have a healthy discussion next Tuesday. – Gtd

From Chief Jones:

Billings:

- Fireworks are illegal within the city limits, encompassing sale, possession, and use, according to the Billings City Code.
- We allow special permits with commercial displays that is coordinated through our fire marshal's office.
- We close Rimrocks on the 4th. (Very problematic and difficult area to fight fires with most fires being started by fireworks).
- This showed that it had merit this as we had 3 fireworks related fired on the rims on the 3rd and none on the 4th which is the day we close them.
- Enforcement is usually complaint driven. With call volumes the way they are it is impossible to be proactive in enforcement even with extra patrols staffing

Bozeman:

- Fireworks are banned, including both sale and discharge, within the city limits.
- You are correct, firework sales and discharge are completely banned inside the city limits and any county property that is wholly surrounded by the city limits.
- We do put on a public display on the night of the 4th and attempt to enforce the ban. We do okay on the 3rd and 5th with enforcement but the 4th we just get run over. It takes so much of our staff to support the show that we just can't keep enough folks in the neighborhoods and it spirals out of control.
- PD helps but if we really want to move the needle we are going to have to look at getting some other folks in the city like code enforcement, parking, building inspectors, etc., involved as FD and PD alone can't keep up on the 4th.

Butte:

- We have no “city limits” as the old city county line was dissolved in 1977 when the city of Butte and Silver Bow county consolidated.
- We passed an ordinance two years ago to shorten the selling and using of fireworks from 11 days to 8. (June 27-July 4). We have no time limits throughout the day.
- No noise ordinance.

Havre:

- Havre follows a city ordinance. Fireworks may be discharged July 2 through July 4th from 0800 to midnight.
- Along with that are other rules dealing with no fireworks in city parks and littering.
- Not all fireworks are allowed. Skyrockets, roman candles, bottle rockets, etc.

Helena:

- Fireworks are restricted to specific locations and times with a permit for commercial displays.
- It is outlined in ordinance #3238.
- It is illegal to shoot off fireworks in the city. Enforcement is complaint driven and up to HPD to deal with.

Kalispell:

- Fireworks are illegal to use or sell within the city limits.

Missoula:

- The City of Missoula does not allow the manufacturer, sale or use of fireworks within city limits, with the following exception. In 2014 the Ordinance was changed to allow the use of novelty fireworks ie. sparklers, party poppers etc.

From Chief Newton:

If the City Commission wants to enact a complete ban on fireworks, from my viewpoint, the following needs to occur:

1. GFFR will need to assist us in enforcement as we have other things that require our attention (our officers were extremely busy dealing with calls for service to include multiple disturbances over the past weekend).
2. If the Commission wants the PD to focus strictly on fireworks complaints, I would likely have to assign officers on overtime to focus solely on that.
3. There would have to be a mindset change in our community.
4. There are multiple fireworks stands, many of which are sitting on County property adjacent to City property. If the City bans fireworks, this issue would need to be addressed as well.

Comments from Chief Jones on enforcement:

The theme that plagues all municipalities is enforcement. GFFR can be a part of a preventative approach to patrol and also can cite violators if a new ordinance is put into place, however this may come with some additional OT to be consistent (non-business hours). To be effective, a fine structure for violations needs to have teeth in it. If the initial fine will hurt someone's pocketbook, it may be enough deterrence to stop some offenders (i.e. first offense =\$500.00, second offense=\$1000 and so on). Others will continue to be violate no matter what the fine structure is.

It may take time to change behavior in the community, but without a strong enforcement approach, we are just spinning our wheels.

Financial Impact?

We have no idea of level or impact of fireworks sales in Great Falls.

Please let me know if you have further questions. – Gtd

From: Rick Tryon <rtryon@greatfallsmt.net>
Sent: Tuesday, July 8, 2025 12:46 PM
To: Greg Doyon <gdoyon@greatfallsmt.net>; Cory Reeves <creeves@greatfallsmt.net>; Joe McKenney <jmckenney@greatfallsmt.net>; Shannon Wilson <swilson@greatfallsmt.net>; Susan Wolff <swolff@greatfallsmt.net>
Cc: Jeremy Jones <jjones@greatfallsmt.net>; Jeff Newton <jnewton@greatfallsmt.net>; David Dennis <ddennis@greatfallsmt.net>; Bryan Lockerby <blockerby@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Re: Discussion about Fireworks

I'd like to hear some data or input from our public safety folks on the following:

- How have the other MT cities that have banned or restricted fireworks measured their success or failure in reducing the negative impacts of the discharge of fireworks in their city limits?
- I've heard several comments that go something like this: "If GFPD isn't enforcing current fireworks code, how would they monitor and enforce a ban." Can we address this on Tuesday? I assume that banning sales would reduce the volume of fireworks explosions and facilitate more focus by police on finding and ticketing violators?
- We should try to get some sense of what has happened, positive and negative, over time in the cities that have restricted or banned fireworks from their leaders and public safety personnel. Is it an overall plus or minus?
- What is the estimated financial impact of fireworks sales in Great Falls? Also, as a side note, it's my understanding that folks from other cities come here specifically to buy and set off fireworks in Great Falls since we are one of the only cities left without a ban (Butte?).

Thanks,

Rick

From: Greg Doyon <gdoyon@greatfallsmt.net>
Sent: Tuesday, July 8, 2025 9:33 AM
To: Cory Reeves <creeves@greatfallsmt.net>; Joe McKenney <jmckenney@greatfallsmt.net>; Rick Tryon <rtryon@greatfallsmt.net>; Shannon Wilson <swilson@greatfallsmt.net>; Susan Wolff <swolff@greatfallsmt.net>
Cc: Jeremy Jones <jjones@greatfallsmt.net>; Jeff Newton <jnewton@greatfallsmt.net>; David Dennis <ddennis@greatfallsmt.net>; Bryan Lockerby <blockerby@greatfallsmt.net>
Subject: Discussion about Fireworks

Mayor Reeves and Commissioners:

I've asked my "assistant" (ChatGPT) to provide a deep overview and history regarding fireworks in GF. I've attached the report.

Remember, this tool is not perfect, but it provides a solid summary with **viewable citations**. I think the summary will be helpful to tee-up conversation on the topic. More to come before next Tuesday.

-Gtd

Gregory T. Doyon

City Manager
City of Great Falls, Montana
Office (406)455-8450
www.greatfallsmt.net



City Manager's Office

Memorandum

To: Mayor Reeves and City Commissioners

From: Greg Doyon – City Manager

Re: Work Session Preparation – Fireworks

Date: July 8, 2025

This memorandum provides the City Commission with additional information on fireworks use in Great Falls and outlines potential options for future restrictions or a ban.

Background on Recent Fireworks Activity and Emergency Response

Great Falls has experienced fluctuating fireworks-related incident levels in recent years. Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) data shows that:

- 2021: 43 fireworks related calls (7/1-7/5)
- 2022: 1 grass fire (wet year)
- 2023: 7 fireworks related calls (4th only)
- 2024: 12 fireworks related calls (4th only)
- 2025: 14 fireworks related calls (6/29-7/6)

The Great Falls Police Department (GFPD) also responds to fireworks complaints. In 2024, GFPD received 20 fireworks disturbance complaints between July 1 and July 4 (with 8 of those on July 4 itself). No citations were issued in 2024; officers handled these calls through education and warnings, and did not encounter repeat violations.

Legal Options for Regulating Fireworks

The City Commission has two primary legal avenues to change fireworks policy: (1) enact a City ordinance restricting or banning certain fireworks, or (2) place the issue before voters via a ballot measure (either through a citizen-initiated petition or a Commission-referred ballot question).

Each option has different procedural requirements and implications, outlined below:

Option 1: Commission-Enacted Ordinance

The Commission can directly adopt an ordinance to impose new fireworks restrictions (for example, banning certain types of fireworks or limiting days/times of use beyond current city code). A new

ordinance would go through the standard city ordinance adoption process (drafting, public notice, and the required readings and public hearing before adoption).

Advantages of a Commission-Enacted Ordinance

- **Tailored Approach:** The Commission has full control to shape the policy. For example, it could restrict only higher-risk fireworks while still allowing small “novelty” items commonly used by children. Specifics such as allowable dates, times, and firework types can be customized to meet local needs.
- **Public Engagement and Adjustability:** This process includes public hearings and formal Commission deliberation, providing opportunities to hear from residents and adjust the proposal accordingly. It allows for an iterative approach—rules can be refined through input and experience rather than relying on a single up-or-down decision.
- **Clear Enforcement Framework:** By adopting an ordinance, the City can establish clear terms for enforcement, including fine amounts, exceptions, or grace periods. This ensures the policy is both enforceable and aligned with the City’s operational capacity.
- **Faster Implementation:** Unlike a ballot measure, which follows the election cycle, a Commission-approved ordinance can be adopted and take effect within a matter of weeks. This means new rules could be in place before the next fireworks season if desired.

Challenges with a Commission-Enacted Ordinance

- **Perceived Overreach:** Some residents may view Commission action—without a public vote—as overstepping on a long-standing tradition. This could generate pushback or even lead to a citizen referendum to overturn the decision.
- **Tradition:** Fireworks are tied to community identity. Restricting them could provoke strong reactions, placing the full weight of the decision on the Commission.
- **Enforcement Complexity:** Moving from education to enforcement will require more resources and consistency.

Option 2: Ballot Measure (Citizen Initiative or Referred Question)

The City Charter empowers Great Falls citizens to initiate ordinances via petition, and likewise allows the City Commission to refer measures to the ballot, in accordance with Montana law. In either scenario, city voters would decide whether to approve a fireworks-related regulation.

The ballot measure could be phrased, for example, as *“Shall the City of Great Falls prohibit the sale and use of [certain] fireworks within city limits?”* with a “Yes” or “No” choice. Important: Montana state law requires that any local ballot question be presented as a yes/no vote on a single, clearly-defined issue, rather than offering multiple options or compound questions.

This means the measure must propose one specific change (for instance, a ban on particular fireworks or a ban on all consumer fireworks), and voters either approve or reject that change. The Commission cannot present a multi-part or multiple-choice question to voters under state law.

Advantages of Referring a Fireworks Question to Voters

- **Community Mandate:** A ballot measure gives voters the final say. If a ban or restriction is approved, it reflects clear public support and provides a strong foundation for implementation. If rejected, it helps clarify that the community prefers the current approach.

- **Broad Public Engagement:** The ballot process invites wide public discussion. It allows both supporters and opponents to make their case, helping ensure the outcome reflects the full range of community views—not just those expressed at Commission meetings.
- **Shared Decision-Making:** Referring the question to voters shifts the responsibility from the Commission alone to the broader electorate. This can be especially helpful on contentious issues, reducing the perception of unilateral action.

Challenges with Referring a Fireworks Measure to Voters

- **Limited Flexibility:** A ballot measure allows only a yes/no vote on a single proposal. Voters can't modify or offer alternatives. Complex policy questions—like which fireworks to allow what penalties to set, or whether to exempt certain items—must be reduced to a binary choice. That rigidity may not reflect the full range of community preferences.
- **Tight Procedural Timeline:** To place a measure on the November ballot, the Commission must adopt a resolution by August 11, 2025. That requires first reading no later than July 15 (or a special meeting). Staff would need clear direction within days to prepare language and supporting materials. While special meetings could extend the timeline slightly, the process remains tight.
- **Uncertain Outcome:** There's no guarantee the measure will pass. If it fails, the Commission may need to revisit the issue from scratch or consider alternative approaches—potentially after a divisive public campaign.

Implementation and Enforcement Considerations

If the City proceeds with new fireworks regulation – whether adopted by ordinance or through a public vote—there are several key operational considerations to address:

- Defining what is or is not allowed under new ordinance or proposed voter approved initiative.
- Either way, if a ban is authorized, how will it be enforced? What are the penalties?
- How will the City monitor performance of either, and assess effectiveness of both?

Please do not hesitate to ask for additional information. – Gtd

Great Falls Fireworks Bans and Regulations: A Historical Overview

Early Regulations and Initial Restrictions

Great Falls' first major fireworks ordinance came in the **mid-1990s** amid growing safety and noise concerns. In **1994**, the City Commission passed **Ordinance 2664**, sharply **limiting when fireworks could be used**. It **restricted the sale and discharge of fireworks to July 2, 3, and 4** between 8:00 a.m. and midnight (effective starting July 1995) ¹. This marked the first city-level "ban" in the sense that fireworks were prohibited outside that narrow window. The ordinance also **banned fireworks on all public property**, including parks, streets, and sidewalks ¹. Fireworks stands were confined to those dates, and any fireworks types **illegal under state law were automatically illegal in the city** ² ³. Essentially, Great Falls aligned its definition of **permissible fireworks** with the State of Montana's rules – for example, allowing ground-based fountains and sparklers, but forbidding explosive firecrackers or aerial rockets which the state didn't allow at the time ³.

This 1994 ordinance was driven by safety concerns and neighborhood complaints. Prior to its enactment, Great Falls had looser fireworks rules (as was common in Montana), and residents could ignite fireworks more freely. The new policy was a **compromise**: it curbed fireworks usage to a few days around Independence Day – addressing fire safety and late-night noise issues – **without an outright year-round ban**. Officials noted they wanted to **allow traditional July 4th celebrations** in a controlled manner ⁴. This compromise approach set the stage for Great Falls' fireworks policies in the following decades.

City Ordinances and Policy Changes Over Time

Great Falls' fireworks rules have been periodically updated, often in response to public safety incidents or to **harmonize with state laws**. Key city-level policy actions include:

- **2007 – Ordinance 2965 Updates:** The city revisited its fireworks regulations and passed an updated ordinance (No. 2965). This **retained the July 2–4 limit** (8 a.m. to midnight) and explicitly **added a New Year's Eve provision**, allowing fireworks to be discharged on December 31 from 10:00 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. on New Year's Day ⁵ ⁶. (Selling fireworks for New Year's remained prohibited – vendors could only operate around July 4th.) The 2007 ordinance also reiterated that Great Falls would follow the **state's list of permissible fireworks**, maintaining the ban on any devices not allowed by Montana law ². This update effectively codified existing practice and closed any gaps (for example, formally acknowledging the small New Year's window that had been informally tolerated).
- **2017 – Comprehensive Code Revision (Ordinance 3158):** In October 2017, the City Commission overhauled portions of the municipal code dealing with public safety, including fireworks. Ordinance 3158 reaffirmed the limited **July 2–4 usage period** (and the Dec. 31 allowance) ⁶, and it carried

forward earlier restrictions like the **ban on public property** use ⁷. A notable addition in this 2017 update was an **emergency-ban provision**: the code now authorizes the **City Manager, in consultation with the Fire Chief, to issue an emergency declaration banning all fireworks** during periods of extreme fire danger ⁸. This gave the city a clear mechanism to **temporarily outlaw fireworks citywide** if conditions (drought, high winds, etc.) made fireworks especially hazardous. The 2017 revisions were largely preventive and administrative – no immediate change was made to the normal July 4th practices, but the city equipped itself with tools to react quickly in a crisis.

Outside these major ordinances, the baseline policy in Great Falls has remained **consistent**: consumer fireworks can be sold and used only around the 4th of July (and briefly on New Year’s Eve), and even then only on **private property**. It is *illegal* to use fireworks in parks, streets, alleys, or other public spaces ¹. Children under age 10 must be under close adult supervision when around fireworks per city code ² ⁹. Violations are a misdemeanor, with fines escalating for repeat offenses ¹⁰. This regulatory framework, first set in the 1990s and tweaked through 2017, shows Great Falls’ attempt to permit celebratory use in moderation while mitigating the downsides of fireworks in an urban environment.

State and Federal Law Intersections

Broader county, state, and federal laws have at times influenced Great Falls’ fireworks policies or their enforcement:

- **Statewide Fireworks Restrictions:** For many years, **Montana state law banned certain types of fireworks** statewide – notably aerial explosives like roman candles and bottle rockets. In fact, since the early 1970s these had been illegal due to their fire-starting risk ¹¹. Great Falls’ local code mirrored this, disallowing any firework that the State didn’t permit ². However, in **2021 the Montana Legislature passed House Bill 215**, signed by Governor Greg Gianforte, which **ended the nearly 50-year state ban on roman candles, sky rockets, and similar aerial fireworks** ¹² ¹¹. After the law took effect (late March 2021), those items became legal to sell and use under state law – and consequently became legal within Great Falls city limits as well. Fireworks vendors in the Great Falls area enthusiastically began stocking these items again ¹². State Fire Marshal Dick Swingley noted this reversal with caution, reminding Montanans that such fireworks are **“unpredictable” fire starters** and urging careful use given Montana’s dry summers ¹¹. The state’s move in 2021 thus broadened what fireworks Great Falls residents could lawfully use, despite local safety officials’ reservations. (Notably, nothing in state law prevented cities from enacting stricter rules; Missoula, Billings, and others continued to ban fireworks outright despite the state-level legalization ¹³.)
- **Other Montana Cities:** Great Falls’ approach has been contrasted with many other Montana cities. By the 2010s, **numerous Montana communities had implemented full fireworks bans**. According to local officials in 2018, cities including **Missoula, Kalispell, Helena, and Billings completely ban fireworks within city limits**, while a few others like Bozeman and Whitefish allow very limited use similar to Great Falls ¹³. This meant Great Falls was somewhat **alone in still permitting consumer fireworks** in residential neighborhoods. City Commissioner Rick Tryon pointed out that Great Falls was “one of the only, if not *the* only” city in Montana still allowing fireworks in neighborhoods as of 2024 ¹⁴. This broader context has put pressure on Great Falls to reconsider its stance, as some citizens argue the city is behind the curve on safety by not banning fireworks as peers have.

- **County and Federal Lands: Cascade County**, which surrounds Great Falls, generally allows fireworks in unincorporated areas (with certain date restrictions similar to state law). However, during times of high wildfire danger the **County Commission can enact emergency burn bans and firework restrictions**. For example, in July 2021 amid a severe drought, Cascade County entered **Stage 1 fire restrictions**, which explicitly stated “**all fireworks are prohibited**” in the county until further notice ¹⁵. Great Falls city officials coordinate closely with county emergency managers on fire conditions. If the county declares an emergency ban, the city often follows suit or is prepared to do so. (City code allows the **City Manager to mirror these restrictions** in the city ¹⁶ ⁸.) There have been instances where county leaders were initially hesitant to ban fireworks despite dry conditions – on June 30, 2021, the county’s Disaster & Emergency Services head said he “didn’t anticipate” needing to ban fireworks ¹⁷ – only to impose a ban days later after fire incidents spiked. By **July 7, 2021**, Stage 1 restrictions took effect and fireworks were abruptly outlawed countywide due to “unseasonably warm dry conditions” ¹⁸ ¹⁹. This county-city interplay means that even without a permanent city ban, **temporary bans have occurred** during extreme fire weather.

On **federal lands** and installations, fireworks are always strictly prohibited. Great Falls is adjacent to Malmstrom Air Force Base; as federal property, personal fireworks are banned on base at all times (military personnel typically must go off-base to use fireworks, which can impact surrounding neighborhoods). Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service **ban fireworks on all federal public lands** in Montana ²⁰. These federal rules come into play because residents sometimes ignite fireworks on riverbanks, hiking areas, or other open lands near the city. Local authorities and the BLM issue annual reminders that such actions are illegal and can carry federal penalties ²⁰. In short, **Great Falls permits fireworks only on private property**, and state/county/federal laws collectively prohibit them in all other contexts – an important legal backdrop to the city’s policy.

- **Montana Fireworks Economy:** One intersection of state and local policy is the fireworks retail economy. Montana’s generally permissive laws make it a popular state for fireworks sales, and Great Falls sees numerous seasonal fireworks stands each year (often just outside city limits to serve county residents as well). The city cannot regulate what happens outside its jurisdiction, so even during city bans or off-days, residents can easily drive a few miles to buy fireworks and shoot them in the county. City Clerk Lisa Kunz highlighted this conflict in a 2025 discussion, noting that **Cascade County allows fireworks** even if the city were to ban them ²¹. This dynamic complicates enforcement: a city-only ban could simply push fireworks activity to the borders of Great Falls, with any stray rockets or effects still potentially impacting the city. It’s a point frequently raised by officials when weighing stricter ordinances.

Public Safety Concerns and Notable Incidents

Fire safety has been the central concern in Great Falls’ fireworks debate, with good reason. Over the years, the city has experienced fires, injuries, and property damage attributed to fireworks – though thankfully rare, some incidents have been severe. These events often reignite calls for tighter restrictions:

- **Major Fire Incidents:** Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) logs show that some Independence Day periods pass relatively uneventfully, but others see **dangerous blazes**. In *July 2015*, for example, GFFR responded to **120 calls** over the July 2–4 window, **two of which were structure fires caused by fireworks** ²². Those two house fires in 2015 caused major property damage and stretched fire

crews thin. The next year (2016) saw another spike – GFFR ran 101 calls from July 2–4, with **32 calls directly involving fireworks** ignitions ²³. At one point during the 2016 Fourth of July night, *all* city fire units were busy on calls (grass fires, dumpster fires, etc.), and mutual aid had to be requested from the Air National Guard and county fire services to handle simultaneous incidents ²⁴. By contrast, 2017 was a calmer year (75 calls, ~10 fireworks-related) ²⁵, aided by wetter weather. Still, the 2015 and 2016 fire outbreaks left an impression on city leaders. GFFR began pre-deploying extra crews and brush trucks every July 4th ²⁶. Those years also prompted behind-the-scenes discussions about whether the current ordinance was doing enough to protect the public.

- **Recurring Grass Fires:** Smaller **grass fires and spot fires** are a common issue each year. For example, during July 2–5 of 2020, the fire department reported **five grass fires and two dumpster fires** in the city attributable to fireworks ²⁷. These were extinguished quickly with minimal damage. However, the potential for a small grass fire to become a conflagration is a constant worry. Great Falls’ urban area has a lot of dry vegetation at its edges (the **wildland-urban interface** near fields and hill slopes). A notable scare was the **Vinyard Fire of 2016** (just outside the city), after which GFFR invested in a new wildland brush truck to better fight grassfires ²⁸. Fireworks are often suspected ignition sources for grassfires near the city. In one case on July 3, 2017, a grass fire near Rainbow Dam (north of city limits) was found to have spent fireworks and a lighter at the origin point ²⁹. Such instances underscore why firefighters remain on high alert each Fourth of July.
- **Injuries and Close Calls:** Injuries from fireworks have occurred, though data is more anecdotal. The Great Falls media has reported on injuries like burns or hand injuries during the holiday, but officials note many **injuries likely go unreported** unless they require an ER visit. In 2021, GFFR noted at least two EMS calls for burn injuries during the July 4 period ³⁰. Law enforcement also experiences “close calls” – City Manager Greg Doyon recounted in 2021 that a **juvenile threw lit fireworks in front of the fire marshal’s moving vehicle** as a prank, with the child’s parents looking on ³¹. “Abusing the fireworks... it’s not the right way to celebrate the holiday,” Doyon warned after that incident ³².
- **2021 Drought and Fire Surge:** The **summer of 2021** was especially alarming. A severe drought and heat wave created tinder-dry conditions. Over the July 4th weekend of 2021, Great Falls fire and police were overwhelmed by fireworks incidents. GFFR Chief Jeremy Jones reported that on July 3–4, **crews responded to 31 grass fires, 11 dumpster/garbage fires, and 2 structure fires – all attributed to fireworks** ³⁰. This was a massive spike in fires compared to prior years. In Chief Jones’ words, the situation was “nuts,” and he had staffed an extra engine company in preparation ³³. The Great Falls Police Department, meanwhile, fielded **45 fireworks complaint calls** on July 4, 2021 alone, and officers themselves had to grab fire extinguishers to put out some small fires before firefighters arrived ³¹ ³⁴. These incidents nearly pushed local resources to the brink. After the holiday, Chief Jones and the fire marshal openly **questioned whether the city should allow fireworks at all under such conditions**, and they initiated talks about stronger measures – for instance, adopting the latest International Fire Code provisions to **require permits for fireworks sales** or to restrict sales during high fire danger ³⁵. The **county’s Stage 1 ban** kicked in on July 7, 2021 (too late to prevent the July 4 chaos, but it banned any further fireworks use that summer) ¹⁸ ¹⁵. The 2021 fire surge became a pivotal event, bolstering the argument of those pushing for a citywide ban or at least emergency ban powers (which, as noted, had been added to the code in 2017 and were now used).

- **2025 Fatal House Fire:** Tragically, the worst-case scenario materialized in **July 2025**. On the evening of July 2, 2025, a fire broke out at a home on 2nd Avenue SW in Great Falls. Fire investigators determined it **started in the yard, likely ignited by fireworks, and then spread to the house** ³⁶ ³⁷. The house became fully engulfed. By the time firefighters gained control, they found that an **elderly woman and her dog and cat had perished in the blaze** ³⁸. The fire was ruled unintentional – a grim accident likely caused by stray fireworks embers landing in dry grass ³⁶ ³⁷. This incident had an immediate impact on public discourse. It was widely reported and struck a chord in Great Falls, underscoring the life-and-death stakes of fireworks fire risk. City Commissioner Rick Tryon described it as a “tragic incident” that *might have been preventable*, fueling his resolve to seek a ban ¹⁴. The 2025 tragedy is, to date, the **most severe fireworks-related incident in Great Falls’ recent history**, and it is likely to influence policy decisions going forward.

In addition to fires, **property damage** from fireworks has included scorched lawns, burnt fences or trees, and occasional damage to roofs or siding from bottle rockets. Local media regularly publish reminders about the **fire hazard and injury risk**. The consistent message from fire and police departments has been one of **caution**: they urge residents each year to water their lawns, keep hoses ready, and cease fireworks at midnight to reduce risks ³⁹. Despite these warnings, the city’s emergency responders often spend a busy July 4th weekend chasing preventable fires. This toll on public safety resources – and the potential for disaster, as seen in 2025 – has been at the heart of arguments for stricter fireworks regulation.

Public Sentiment and Debate

Debate over fireworks in Great Falls has simmered for decades, usually flaring up in the aftermath of each July 4th. **Public sentiment** is divided: many cherish fireworks as a patriotic tradition, while others see them as a nuisance and danger. Over time, however, there’s evidence that **support for a ban or tighter rules has grown**, especially as other cities in Montana have outlawed fireworks.

- **Citizen Complaints:** One barometer of public sentiment is the volume of complaints to law enforcement. Those numbers have climbed in recent years. The Great Falls Police Department reported fireworks “calls for service” (complaints from the public) during the July 2–5 period as follows: **60 calls in 2018, 79 in 2019, and 96 in 2020** ⁴⁰. By 2020, fireworks noise was the *number one* source of calls to police over the holiday. Residents complain about **sleep disruption**, frightened pets, veterans with PTSD being rattled by explosions, and general annoyance when fireworks continue late into the night or on days they aren’t allowed ⁴¹ ⁴². As one resident, B.J. Angermeier, told the City Commission, “We’ve all been awake at 1 in the morning wondering when is it going to stop” ⁴³. Such quality-of-life concerns have been a major driver of the debate. When police receive nearly 100 calls in a few days (as in 2020), it indicates a significant portion of the populace is fed up with how fireworks are being used in the city.
- **Citizen Advocacy for Bans:** Great Falls residents have **formally petitioned or spoken up for a ban** on multiple occasions. A notable example came in **February 2018**, when B.J. Angermeier addressed the City Commission directly. She **asked the city to ban fireworks within city limits entirely**, citing not only lost sleep but also public safety strain ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵. Angermeier presented statistics: by her count, there had been *471 fireworks-related calls* to Great Falls police in the first week of July over the prior six years ⁴⁶. She argued this was an unreasonable burden and that “our safety is more important than enforcing fireworks misconduct” ⁴⁷. Her testimony noted how other Montana cities have bans (Missoula, Helena, Billings, etc.) and urged Great Falls to follow suit ¹³. While city leaders

thanked her, they did not move to change the ordinance at that time. Nonetheless, her appeal was one of the early public pushes in recent memory calling for an outright ban.

Similarly, in **September 2021**, after another rough fire season, resident **Sally Myhre** submitted comments to the commission *urging that fireworks be made illegal to set off in Great Falls – or at least restricted to certain designated areas, rather than every neighborhood* ⁴⁸. *By this point, her plea echoed what others had voiced: some citizens were asking, why** is Great Falls still allowing this, given the annual problems?

- **Public Forums and Opposition:** City officials have tried to gauge public sentiment through forums. **Mayor Bob Kelly** (in office 2016–2020) convened a **town hall meeting on fireworks** (circa 2017) to let residents debate the issue. According to participants, it was a **heated discussion** with strong opinions on both sides ⁴⁹. **Fireworks enthusiasts** – including some families and local fireworks stand operators – spoke about the enjoyment and **patriotic symbolism** of personal fireworks. They argued that with proper caution, individuals should be allowed to celebrate as they always have, and that a ban would punish law-abiding celebrants due to a few irresponsible people. Great Falls has a culture of homegrown 4th of July celebrations, and many long-time residents fondly recall setting off fireworks as kids. This camp often cites **personal freedom** and tradition. On the other side, many residents – especially those who are older, have small children, or own pets – passionately favored a ban or stricter limits, sharing stories of frightened animals, debris littering their yards, and near-misses with fires. News reports noted that the town hall did not produce any consensus; if anything, it revealed a community **roughly split** on the issue, and the City Commission chose not to change the ordinance afterward ⁴⁹.
- **Letters and Editorials:** Local newspapers and radio have periodically featured the fireworks debate. The *Great Falls Tribune* has run letters to the editor both **supporting** and **condemning** fireworks use in the city. While we don't have specific Tribune quotes here, the trend mirrors what city meetings show: growing support for ending the neighborhood fireworks tradition. In July 2020, for instance, after another noisy holiday, Commissioner Rick Tryon said, *"I have never heard it as bad as it was"* in terms of complaints ⁵⁰. Fellow Commissioner Mary Moe concurred that she'd received many calls from constituents about fireworks disturbances ⁵¹. Such remarks imply that public tolerance is wearing thin. Local columnists have also chimed in; one commentator observed that the **biggest problem** is many people simply **don't obey the rules** – they shoot fireworks days before and after July 4th, and late into the night, undermining the compromise of the ordinance ⁵². This lawlessness angle frustrates both proponents and opponents of fireworks, and it suggests that enforcement alone (without a ban) has been ineffective.
- **Enforcement Challenges:** An important aspect of the debate is that **enforcing the current rules is difficult**. Police rarely issue citations for illegal fireworks. As Police Chief Dave Bowen explained, by the time officers can respond to a fireworks complaint, "the incident is over and/or people scatter." He noted it's usually not "worth a foot pursuit" for a firecracker ⁵³. In fact, from 2018–2020, **Great Falls police issued zero fireworks citations**, even though they received dozens upon dozens of complaints ⁵⁴. This near-zero enforcement undermines the ordinance's intended limits. Those who abide by the rules feel others "get away with it," and those disturbed by fireworks see little consequence for violators. City officials have acknowledged this and it feeds into the policy discussion: some feel a **ban would at least send a stronger message** and be easier to enforce (anything heard or seen would be clearly illegal), while others worry a ban would be flouted just as much as the current rules – meaning the police would still be chasing phantom violators, now with

even **more** people in violation. This debate about practical enforceability often comes up in commission meetings ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ , with opinions split on whether a ban would meaningfully change behavior.

In summary, **public opinion in Great Falls has incrementally shifted** toward favoring more restrictions on fireworks, especially after high-profile fires and as complaint numbers rise. A solid core of residents still advocates for personal responsibility and keeping the tradition alive. But when polled informally or judging by testimony, there is a sense that **each year the pro-ban voices grow louder**. Importantly, elected officials who once staunchly defended the status quo have begun to waver in recent years, suggesting the political calculus is changing (see below).

Official and Unofficial Calls for Bans/Restrictions

Over the years, numerous **calls to action** have come from officials, safety personnel, and citizens – both in official meetings and through media – regarding fireworks policy. Below are some of the key calls for bans or tighter rules, and the outcomes:

- **“Compromise” Ordinance Origins:** The current limited-days ordinance itself was the result of official advocacy by public safety leaders. Former Police Chief Dave Bowen noted that *“years ago, he and the fire chief worked to develop the ordinance as it exists now, which was a compromise”* between a full ban and unrestricted use ⁴ . That effort, likely in the early 1990s, was an official initiative to rein in fireworks due to escalating problems at the time. The compromise was essentially to allow only July 2–4. Thus, one could say **Great Falls’ first fireworks ban was partial – banning fireworks 362 days of the year** – and it was driven by city officials’ concerns.
- **2018 Citizen Proposal:** B.J. Angermeier’s **2018 appeal for a ban** (discussed earlier) was an unofficial citizen request presented in an official forum. After she spoke at the February 6, 2018 commission meeting, **none of the commissioners moved to put the item on a future agenda**, effectively tabling it ⁴⁴ ⁵⁷ . However, her testimony did prompt Mayor Kelly to promise a public meeting (the town hall that followed). While no ordinance change occurred in 2018, that year appears to have been a turning point where the **city openly acknowledged the discontent** and agreed to monitor the situation more closely.
- **2019–2020 Increased Attention:** In the summers of 2019 and 2020, as complaints mounted, some city commissioners themselves began calling for reevaluation of the law. Commissioner **Rick Tryon** was elected in late 2019 and quickly became a vocal figure on this issue. After July 4, 2020 brought record complaints, Tryon suggested the city **consider a more stringent approach**. He floated the idea on social media of a public advisory vote, asking: *“What do you think about putting it on a city ballot and letting the people decide?”* ⁵⁸ . This question, posed on his Facebook page in 2020, generated a lot of public comment (some for, some against a ban). **No formal action was taken in 2020**, but the seed was planted for a direct democracy approach. The commission seemed content to “wait and see” at that point.
- **2021 Fire Officials’ Push:** The extreme events of 2021 led to more **urgent official calls**. GFFR Chief Jeremy Jones, after the July 2021 fires, publicly raised the prospect of **tightening city code** – for example, empowering the fire marshal to require permits for fireworks stands or to outright **ban sales during high fire danger** ³⁵ . (Under current law, the city cannot forbid state-legal fireworks

sales except by emergency declaration, which in 2021 came too late to stop vendors.) Jones' proposal essentially would integrate **fire conditions into law** – meaning if certain drought indices are met, fireworks use/sales would automatically be suspended. This idea was to be explored by adopting the International Fire Code updates. It didn't immediately result in a code change, but it was an official call for more control. Additionally, **Cascade County's commissioners** in 2021 lamented that they lacked authority (under state law) to ban fireworks pre-emptively before July 4 – they could only do emergency declarations once conditions were severe. County officials joined city voices in 2021 in asking the public **not** to use fireworks at all due to fire danger (even before the Stage 1 ban). These pleas were unofficial but widely covered, and likely prevented some incidents.

- **Political Leadership Changes:** By 2022 and 2023, Great Falls had some new faces in leadership (including a new mayor and some new commissioners). **Cory Reeves** became mayor (or mayor pro tem) by 2024–25. Reeves, initially not predisposed to banning fireworks, changed tone after experiencing the persistent complaints. During a **January 3, 2025 city commission retreat**, Mayor **Reeves suggested putting a fireworks ordinance change on the ballot** for voters to decide ⁵⁹. He noted he had gotten “a lot of complaints” about New Year's Eve fireworks that year (people were shooting them off outside the allowed 10pm–12:30am window) ⁶⁰. Reeves openly said the **commission itself was divided on fireworks** and questioned, “Why do us five have to make that decision?” – hinting that maybe the public should settle it ⁶¹. While City Manager Greg Doyon replied that *sure, a ballot measure is possible*, other commissioners like Joe McKenney pushed back, saying if it's not legally required to go to a ballot, the commission should “**do its job**” and **make the call** ⁶². No immediate vote was scheduled, but Reeves' remarks signaled a significant shift: the **mayor of Great Falls was now open to a ban** (or at least to letting a ban happen via voters). This was a notable official endorsement for reconsidering the long-standing policy.
- **2025 Post-Tragedy Calls:** The fatal fire on July 2, 2025 dramatically accelerated official action. The very next week, Commissioner **Rick Tryon** announced that at the upcoming July 15, 2025 commission meeting, he would be **seeking consensus to draft a resolution or code change to ban fireworks inside city limits starting in 2026** ¹⁴. He broadcast this plan on Facebook on July 5, saying it was “*in response to a whole lot of strongly worded public concern and comment*” that he'd received after the tragedy ¹⁴. Tryon clarified that a ban could still **allow professional displays** (such as the city's annual Independence Day show), but would prohibit individuals from lighting consumer fireworks in Great Falls ⁵⁶. By pushing the effective date to 2026, he aimed to give time for planning and public education. This is arguably the most significant official step toward a ban in the city's history. As of this writing (mid-July 2025), the **City Commission is slated to debate the proposal**, and it could either enact a ban ordinance directly or vote to put the question on the November 2025 ballot for residents ⁶³ ⁶⁴. Tryon's advocacy is backed by the fire department and a segment of citizens citing safety, though it may face opposition from fireworks businesses and tradition-minded residents. Mayor Reeves, noting the earlier discussion, appears supportive of letting the public vote on it if the commission doesn't unanimously agree ⁶¹ ⁵⁶.
- **Ongoing Informal Pressure:** Throughout these years, **unofficial calls** have come from sources like neighborhood councils, social media groups, and even local veterinarians (concerned about pet trauma). The summer of 2023 saw active discussion on community Facebook pages about the pros and cons of a ban, reflecting a grassroots push. Meanwhile, local media figures have added their voices: for example, in July 2025, columnist Jackie “Mike” Brown of *The Western Word* blog wrote that it's “*time to let the voters in Great Falls decide if fireworks used by private citizens should be allowed.*” He

pointed to the high number of emergency calls and fires as evidence that the current policy isn't working, suggesting the city could **"save a lot of money"** by not having to respond to so many incidents if personal fireworks were outlawed ⁶⁵ ⁶⁴ . This kind of commentary, while unofficial, contributes to public pressure on the commission.

It's worth noting that **opposition to a ban** also exists, though it's been somewhat quieter in official channels. Fireworks retailers and some residents often argue via letters or testimony that enforcement of existing rules (perhaps with higher fines or more police presence) would be preferable to a ban. They express that a ban would punish everyone for the actions of a reckless few, and worry it could lead to "government overreach" on personal celebrations. During the 2018 town hall, for instance, some attendees bristled at the idea of government taking away "fun." These voices will likely be heard again as the 2025–2026 ban proposal moves forward, potentially lobbying the commission to stick with the status quo. However, no organized group against the ban has publicly formed yet; the debate is still largely playing out in public comments and individual statements.

Policy Changes and Key Dates Timeline

To summarize the **historical trajectory of fireworks policy and public debate** in Great Falls, the following table highlights major policy actions, proposals, and events (including notable incidents and public responses):

Date/ Year	Policy Action or Event	Details and Outcome
1994	City restricts fireworks use (Ordinance 2664)	Great Falls adopts a new ordinance limiting fireworks sales and discharge to July 2–4 (8 a.m. to midnight) each year ¹ . This took effect in 1995 and banned fireworks the rest of the year except by special permit. Fireworks were also prohibited on all public property (parks, streets, etc.) ¹ . The ordinance followed state law in banning dangerous aerial fireworks (e.g. M-80s, bottle rockets) within city limits ² ³ . This was the first major city-level restriction, prompted by safety concerns and a desire to curb widespread fireworks use in neighborhoods.
2007	Ordinance 2965 update	The city updates its fireworks code without significantly changing allowed dates. Ordinance 2965 reaffirms the July 2–4 window (8 a.m.–midnight) and adds an allowance for New Year's Eve : fireworks may be discharged Dec. 31 from 10:00 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. Jan. 1 ⁵ ⁶ . Fireworks sales remain restricted to the July period. The updated code explicitly states that permissible fireworks in Great Falls are those allowed by Montana state law ² . Overall, this was an incremental tweak; it acknowledged the New Year's tradition and clarified definitions, but did not otherwise loosen or tighten local restrictions.

Date/ Year	Policy Action or Event	Details and Outcome
2015	Significant fire damage	A notably bad year for fireworks fires. Between July 2–4, 2015, GFFR responded to 120 calls , including two structure fires caused by fireworks that led to major property damage ²² . Multiple grass fires and other blazes kept all units busy. This prompted GFFR to enhance staffing in subsequent years and heightened internal discussions about risk. (No ordinance change occurred immediately, but 2015's fires set the stage for future debate on whether the existing rules were adequate.)
2016	Back-to-back incidents	Another difficult Fourth of July: GFFR ran 101 calls from July 2–4, 2016, with 32 calls confirmed as fireworks-related (including grass fires and two simultaneous house fire threats) ⁶⁶ ²⁴ . At one point, city fire crews were overextended and mutual aid was needed ²⁴ . In response, the fire department acquired a new wildland brush truck and improved coordination with county fire services ²⁸ . These consecutive years of high fire activity underscored the danger of fireworks in dry conditions.
2017	"Compromise" reaffirmed; emergency ban power added	Fewer incidents in 2017 (75 calls, ~10 fires) gave a brief respite ²⁵ . The City Commission held a public town hall on fireworks (led by Mayor Bob Kelly) to gather citizen input – it revealed passionate opinions but no consensus , so the ordinance remained unchanged ⁴⁹ . Later that year, in October 2017, the city passed Ordinance 3158 , a broad public safety code update. It maintained the limited fireworks dates and private-property restrictions ⁶ ⁷ . Crucially, it added that the City Manager may, after consulting the Fire Chief, declare an emergency ban on fireworks during high-risk periods ⁸ . This gave legal teeth to temporarily ban fireworks if needed (a reaction to lessons from 2015–16).
Feb 2018	Citizen petition to ban fireworks	Great Falls resident B.J. Angermeier addressed the City Commission asking for a complete ban on fireworks in the city ⁴⁴ . She cited sleepless nights, 471 police calls over six years, and at least 8 grass fires in early July 2017 as justification ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ . She noted that cities like Missoula, Billings, Helena already banned fireworks ¹³ . Outcome: the Commission thanked her but did not pursue an ordinance change . A public forum (town hall) was held later in 2018, where fireworks proponents and opponents clashed verbally, and city leaders opted to maintain the status quo (July 2–4 use) ⁴⁹ .
2018–2019	"Calls down" and steady policy	Perhaps helped by wetter weather, fire calls over July 4 decreased in 2018 and 2019 (GFFR noted fewer incidents than 2015–16) ⁶⁷ . The policy remained steady. However, police complaints increased (60→79 over 2018–19) ⁴⁰ . Public safety officials characterized the ordinance as a necessary compromise that they continued to support publicly ⁴ . No major changes or proposals in these years aside from continued enforcement of existing rules.

Date/ Year	Policy Action or Event	Details and Outcome
July 2020	Record complaints; official concern	Fireworks complaints in the city reached a new high: GFPD logged 96 calls from July 2–5, 2020 ⁴⁰ . GFFR dealt with several small fires (5 grass, 2 dumpster) ²⁷ . No serious injuries or house fires occurred, but quality-of-life complaints peaked . In a July 2020 meeting, Commissioner Rick Tryon and others noted they'd never heard so many negative comments ⁵⁰ . Tryon publicly suggested possibly reviewing the ordinance or letting voters decide in the future ⁵⁸ . Still, the Commission took no immediate action beyond educating the public.
June– July 2021	Drought emergency; many fires; temporary ban	A severe drought and heat led to explosive fire activity over the 4th. During July 2–4, 2021, Great Falls saw 31 grass fires, 11 dumpster fires, and 2 structure fires directly tied to fireworks ³⁰ . Several people suffered burns ³⁰ . Fire and police officials labeled it one of the worst years. City Manager Doyon admonished “abusing the fireworks... doesn’t bode well” as firefighters dodged fireworks thrown at vehicles ³¹ . In response, on July 6, 2021, Cascade County declared Stage 1 fire restrictions , and all fireworks were prohibited in the county effective July 7 ¹⁸ ¹⁵ . The city, through the manager’s emergency powers, mirrored this ban within city limits. The ban remained until weather improved. This was the first time Great Falls had to invoke an emergency fireworks ban . Also in July 2021, Gov. Gianforte declared a statewide drought emergency ⁶⁸ . After the holiday, GFFR’s Chief and Fire Marshal urged the Commission to consider stronger measures going forward – such as adopting fire codes to control or ban fireworks sales during high fire danger ³⁵ .
Sept 2021	Citizen echoes ban request	Following the harrowing summer, resident Sally Myhre submitted public comments urging the Commission to make it illegal to set off fireworks in Great Falls (or at least restrict them by area) ⁴⁸ . This reinforced the message that a segment of the public wanted a total ban. The commission acknowledged her concern but postponed any policy decision, effectively carrying the issue into the next year for consideration.
2022– 2023	Continued debate, no new ordinance	These years saw relatively normal fire seasons. Great Falls did not have a citywide ban in July 2022 or 2023, and fireworks use resumed during the July 2–4 periods. Complaints remained high, though slightly down from 2020. The City Commission did not enact any new law, but discussion persisted . By 2023, Great Falls was one of the last Montana cities allowing neighborhood fireworks ¹⁴ , a fact often mentioned in letters to the editor. Commissioners like Rick Tryon increasingly leaned toward a ban, while others were cautious. No formal proposals were brought forward in 2023, but it set the stage for 2024’s campaign season where fireworks policy became a local talking point.

Date/ Year	Policy Action or Event	Details and Outcome
Jan 2025	Mayor suggests ballot measure	At a January 3, 2025 strategic planning session, Mayor (Commissioner) Cory Reeves raised the idea of placing a fireworks ban or ordinance change on the public ballot ⁶⁹ . He noted he received many New Year's Eve fireworks complaints (outside legal hours) and sensed the community was "divided" on what to do ⁵⁵ . Reeves questioned whether the Commission should decide or let voters decide ⁷⁰ . While no immediate action was taken, this was significant: the city's top elected official openly acknowledged the possibility of a direct vote on banning fireworks . Other commissioners had mixed views – some felt it was their responsibility to act without a referendum ⁶² . This discussion indicated that momentum was building for an impending policy decision.
July 2, 2025	Fatal house fire triggers outcry	A devastating house fire (1100 block 2nd Ave SW) killed an elderly woman and her two pets , with investigators stating fireworks were the likely cause ³⁸ ³⁷ . The fire started in the dry grass of her yard after neighborhood fireworks on July 2. This tragedy was widely reported and struck the community. Public reaction was swift – many citizens took to social media and contacted officials, calling for an immediate ban on fireworks in the city. It underscored the worst fears of fire officials and gave new urgency to policy change.
July 5, 2025	Commissioner proposes 2026 ban	In the wake of the fatal fire, City Commissioner Rick Tryon announced he would introduce a resolution to ban consumer fireworks inside city limits starting in 2026 ¹⁴ . His proposal (to be discussed at the July 15, 2025 meeting) would allow only professional displays and outlaw all personal fireworks use in Great Falls. Tryon cited "strongly worded public concern" and said this step is needed for safety ¹⁴ . This represents the first official action toward a <i>permanent citywide ban</i> . Depending on the Commission's vote, the ban could either be adopted into law or put to voters in the November 2025 municipal election ⁷¹ . As of July 2025, the outcome is pending, but there is clear momentum among city leaders to finally resolve the long-running fireworks debate, potentially by ending the tradition of personal fireworks in Great Falls .

Conclusion

Over the decades, Great Falls' policy on fireworks has gradually tightened, reflecting a balancing act between community **celebration and public safety**. The city went from virtually unrestricted fireworks in the mid-20th century to a **highly regulated framework by the 1990s**, and now, in the mid-2020s, is on the verge of possibly an **outright ban on consumer fireworks**. A combination of factors has driven this evolution:

- **Safety Concerns:** Repeated incidents of fires – including the deadly 2025 blaze – and injuries have made the risks undeniable. Each severe fire season (2015, 2016, 2021, etc.) added pressure to restrict

fireworks more. Fire and police officials have consistently warned that even the limited legal window can strain emergency services and endanger lives ³⁰ ³⁷ .

- **Public Sentiment:** While many in Great Falls love fireworks, a growing segment of residents have voiced frustration and fear about them. Complaint data and citizen petitions show a clear upward trend in support of a ban or stricter rules ⁴⁰ ⁴⁶ . People cite sleepless nights, terrified pets, veterans with trauma, property damage, and general disturbance of the peace. The **civic conversation** has shifted from “how do we enforce the rules better?” to “should we allow this at all in a city of 60,000 people?” – especially as other cities have outlawed fireworks and still host enjoyable public displays.
- **Regional Laws and Norms:** Great Falls does not exist in a vacuum. Montana’s state decision to allow more powerful fireworks in 2021 ¹² , paradoxically, heightened local concerns, as it introduced more fire-prone devices. Conversely, seeing peer cities implement bans put Great Falls somewhat on the defensive to justify its laxer policy ¹³ . County and federal regulations (like fire bans on bad fire-weather days) have also curtailed fireworks at times ¹⁵ , reinforcing the idea that local authorities *can* and *will* ban fireworks when conditions demand – so a permanent ban is not unthinkable.
- **Effectiveness of Current Policy:** The “compromise” ordinance allowing July 2–4 use worked for a time, but enforcement issues and widespread non-compliance (fireworks going off outside allowed hours) have undermined it ⁷² ⁵³ . City officials have openly questioned whether the compromise still makes sense if it’s routinely abused ⁵⁵ . The fatal 2025 fire – which happened **on July 2, within the legal window** – further challenges the notion that a limited allowance is safe enough.

As of **mid-2025**, Great Falls finds itself at a crossroads. The City Commission is actively considering a measure to **ban fireworks in 2026**, which would mark a historic policy shift. The coming months will likely involve robust public debate – possibly a ballot initiative – weighing tradition against safety. If a ban is enacted, Great Falls would join the ranks of other Montana cities that celebrate Independence Day with **professional shows and without neighborhood fireworks**. On the other hand, if the ban effort falters, the city may opt for intermediate steps: stricter enforcement, shorter hours, or requiring permits for use.

One way or another, the conversation illustrates Great Falls’ effort to balance “**life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness**” in a very literal sense. Fireworks bring joy and excitement, but they have also brought injury and loss. City leaders like Commissioner McKenney have noted that if a ban is adopted, they “*need to have the ability to enforce it*” effectively ⁷³ – signaling that any policy change will come with a plan for implementation. Likewise, officials have discussed exempting public events (so the community can still enjoy a safe, centralized display) ⁵⁶ . Great Falls’ civic groups are already stepping up to fund big public fireworks shows as an alternative to private use ⁷⁴ ⁷⁵ .

In conclusion, the **historical trajectory** of fireworks regulation in Great Falls has been one of increasing caution. From the first restricted-use ordinance in 1994 ¹ , to the emergency bans of recent years ¹⁵ , to the imminent possibility of a full ban, the city’s policies have responded to mounting evidence of harm. Public sentiment, once lukewarm on a ban, appears to be moving toward prioritizing **safety and quiet**. The coming decisions in 2025–2026 will be informed by the extensive history detailed above. Regardless of the outcome, this history shows a clear pattern: **each time fireworks cause major problems, Great Falls officials revisit the rules**. Now, after decades of debate and incremental steps, the city may be ready to close the chapter on private fireworks and embrace a safer way to celebrate. As local commentary put it,

perhaps it's *"time to let the voters decide"* and settle the issue in line with the community's current values ⁶⁴ . If Great Falls does ban fireworks, it will do so having exhausted many other remedies – a decision shaped by years of real-world experience, public input, and the hard lessons of history.

Sources:

- City of Great Falls Code of Ordinances & Council Proceedings (1994–2017) ¹ ⁶ ⁸
- The Electric (Great Falls news) – *Jenn Rowell*, various articles 2017–2025 covering fireworks rules, incidents, and public meetings ⁶⁶ ³⁰ ⁴⁰ ⁴⁴
- Montana Right Now / KULR-8 News – *Afiq Hisham*, "Law change brings certain fireworks back after decades-long ban" (June 26, 2021) ¹² ¹¹
- Cascade County/Great Falls Emergency Management releases (Stage I fire restrictions, 2021) ¹⁵ ¹⁹
- Great Falls city commission discussions (2020–2025) as reported by The Electric and local blogs ⁶⁹ ¹⁴
- The Western Word – *J.M. Brown*, "The Monday Memo" (July 7, 2025) – local commentary on fireworks debate ⁶⁵ ⁶⁴ .

¹ ² ³ ⁵ ⁹ **uOrdinance 2965**

<https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/ordinance/139871/ord2965.pdf>

⁴ ²⁷ ⁴⁰ ⁴¹ ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ ⁵¹ ⁵³ ⁵⁴ **Fireworks complaints up this year - The Electric**

<https://theelectricgf.com/2020/07/08/fireworks-complaints-up-this-year/>

⁶ ⁷ **greatfallsmt.net**

<https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/ordinance/141521/ord3158fr.pdf>

⁸ ¹⁶ **Stage One fire restrictions announced for Great Falls**

<https://www.krtv.com/news/fire-watch/stage-one-fire-restrictions-announced-for-great-falls>

¹⁰ **Fireworks Rules & Regulations | City of Great Falls Montana**

<https://greatfallsmt.net/community/fireworks-rules-regulations>

¹¹ ¹² **Law change brings certain fireworks back after decades-long ban | Great Falls News | montanarightnow.com**

https://www.montanarightnow.com/great-falls/law-change-brings-certain-fireworks-back-after-decades-long-ban/article_17f47098-d6e5-11eb-a5ba-33a22ae23f2e.html

¹³ ⁴² ⁴³ ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ ⁵⁷ **Resident asks city to consider banning fireworks within city limits - The Electric**

<https://theelectricgf.com/2018/02/09/resident-asks-city-to-consider-banning-fireworks-within-city-limits/>

¹⁴ ⁵² ⁵⁸ ⁶³ ⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ ⁷¹ ⁷² **The Monday Memo | The Western Word**

<https://thewesternword.com/2025/07/07/the-monday-memo-290/>

¹⁵ ¹⁷ ¹⁸ ¹⁹ ³⁰ ³¹ ³² ³³ ³⁴ ³⁵ ⁶⁸ **Cascade County implements Stage 1 fire restrictions; fireworks calls up in city - The Electric**

<https://theelectricgf.com/2021/07/06/cascade-county-implements-stage-1-fire-restrictions-fireworks-calls-up-in-city/>

²⁰ **Fireworks rules in Montana for Independence Day weekend | Montana News | montanarightnow.com**

https://www.montanarightnow.com/montana/fireworks-rules-in-montana-for-independence-day-weekend/article_c00163d7-e6b0-4ab1-9e68-be7787822731.html

21 55 56 59 60 61 62 69 70 73 City Commission discusses annual goals - The Electric

<https://theelectricgf.com/2025/02/07/city-commission-discusses-annual-goals/>

22 23 24 25 26 28 29 66 67 Fewer calls over this July 4 holiday than previous years; open burning remains prohibited in Cascade County - The Electric

<http://theelectricgf.com/2017/07/07/fewer-calls-over-this-july-4-holiday-than-previous-years-open-burning-remains-prohibited-in-cascade-county/>

36 37 38 39 Fatal fire believed to be caused by fireworks - The Electric

<https://theelectricgf.com/2025/07/03/fatal-fire-believed-to-be-caused-by-fireworks/>

48 Regular City Commission Meeting

https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/city_commission/meeting/255234/092121_min-f.pdf

74 75 Foundation fundraising to continue community fireworks display - The Electric

<https://theelectricgf.com/2025/06/20/foundation-fundraising-to-continue-community-fireworks-display/>

CITY OF GREAT FALLS

Great Falls Police Department

112 1st Street South
Great Falls, MT 59401
Phone: (406) 727-7688
Fax: (406) 453-8141



TO: Greg Doyon

FROM: Chief Jeff Newton

DATE: 07-17-2025Newton

RE: Fireworks issues in other communities

I had reached out to other Chiefs in the State to ask about their fireworks response. I asked four questions. I have not heard back from the Chiefs in Helena, Kalispell, East Helena or Sidney yet.

1. For those with a ban on fireworks in your City, have you seen any impact, meaning do people do anyways?
2. Have you seen an increase in people shooting off fireworks in the last several years?
3. Do you do preventative enforcement, or do you respond to the complaints when your staff has time?
4. Are you able to mitigate it in any form?

Responses:

Chief Snavelly – Hamilton Police Department

It's funny you bring this up. It was mentioned at our council meeting last night and they will be discussing it next week at the committee meeting. I'll be interested in the responses as well.

Chief Colyer – Missoula Police Department

1. *We still prohibit fireworks within municipal code. Yes, people do them anyway.*
2. *Police incidents (Actual holiday only) **July 4, 2024: 23; July 4, 2025: 30***
 - a. *Police incidents (first full weekend of July): **July 5-7, 2024: 6; July 3-5, 2025: 43***
3. *We do some PSA radio spots in advance; We do not dispatch officers to these incidents unless there is something else going on (i.e. a disturbance, explicit hazard or other criminal conduct). Barring some additional information, they go out as a “general broadcast” and if an officer is nearby and available they are expected to respond. We almost always start with a warning, so as to not be too much of a buzz kill. If it continues they certainly issue citations.*
4. *Not really. We ask for voluntary compliance. It has been somewhat of a non-event for us as of late, but as I say that, I’m sure I jinxed myself.*

Chief Matosich – Havre Police Department

1. *For those with a ban on fireworks in your City, have you seen any impact, meaning do people do it anyways.*
 - ***Yes, that’s how the city of Havre was originally set up but even at that, we could not keep up with the calls so they allowed for fireworks (thinking we would have less problems and be more control) but the problem seemed to get worse. If I remember correctly, the year they allowed for it, we did have a house fire because of it and that turned into a big civil suit between the neighbors.***
2. *Have you seen an increase in people shooting off fireworks over the last several years.*
 - ***Yes, especially with our reservations selling the big fireworks, reduced prices. This year I saw many more firework stands then previous years. City Ordinance prevents selling in the city unless they get a special permit from the fire chief.***
3. *Do you do preventative enforcement, or do you respond to the complaints when your staff has time.*
 - ***Yes, Myself and the Fire Chief do PSA’s and social media and then the firework stands in the city limits have to hand out educational material on the laws and safety. If the patrol is not busy, they try to show a good presence to deter people but they will respond once they clear from being on prior calls.***
4. *Are you able to mitigate it in any form?*
 - ***No, not really because we don’t have the man power to enforce it and many people don’t care so they do it anyways. By the time the officer is able to respond to the complaint, there is no one around.***

Chief Veltcamp – Bozeman Police Department

1. *We had a very confusing quasi-ban until last year when an entire ban was enacted. Fireworks have gone down, but folks also know to call now since there should be no fireworks. Plus, since there are still firework stands in the middle of the City on tiny unannexed land, it is confusing.*
2. *Fireworks calls are going down a bit: 2023: 74; 2024: 66; 2025: 57.*
3. *Most of the time, we respond reactively and when available. Last year the FD cruised around in their big red trucks to educate. This year, a patrol team on their overlap day focused on responding to fireworks in 2 officer cars.*
4. *Not really. After a few years of no City fireworks show, we started one up again last year hoping that would satiate the need for fireworks.*

Chief St. John – Billings Police Department (His post 4th of July report)

Good day gents. We have had a ban for many years, and it was marginally effective back in the day. Nobody pays attention and the \$110 fine is no deterrent. We look like Beirut in the 80's when it gets dark. Below is the update I gave the CA.

Per your request, an overview of our activities spanning midnight on 7/4 through midnight on 7/6.

Officers responded to 829 calls for service during that time span consisting of:

1. *171 fireworks calls. That is compared to 178 during the same period in 2024. So far, three fireworks citations have been turned in.*
2. *A homicide on July 4 resulted in 17 officers and detectives signed out at the scene. Several noon shift officers were called in early for noon shift to help cover the city.*
3. *The other major scene of the weekend was a Montana Highway Patrol-involved crash July 6 on Highway 3 which resulted in 10 officers assisting with the scene.*
4. *The PD fielded DUI overtime shifts. Final numbers of contacts and citations are not yet available; however, officers had 4 DUI cases and there were 12 calls for service labeled as DUI.*
5. *RiverStone Health reported an overdose spike alert (3 incidents in the previous 24 hours) on the evening of July 4th. BPD did not report any overdose deaths. No further information on the types of drugs involved or incidents. According to the sergeant on duty, Billings Fire Department and AMR respond so quickly that those services are more likely to be involved in overdose situations than BPD. On July 4th, there were 302 CFS. 100 were fireworks complaints, officers were only sent on 11 of those complaints, most likely no dispatch or too cold.*

The most frequent call for service types were:

Fireworks – 171

Traffic Stops – 73

Verbal Disturbances – 43

Suspicious Circumstances – 41

Welfare Checks - 38

The most frequent case types were:

PFMA – 15

Mental Health – 11

Disturbances – 8

Drugs (other) – 5

Criminal Mischief to Residences, Theft from Vehicles and DUI - 4 each

Challenges and considerations going forward.

Challenges:

1. *Overburdened Dispatch and Response:* A significant challenge is the sheer volume of calls related to fireworks, particularly around holidays like the Fourth of July. This can overwhelm emergency dispatch centers and impact response times for other urgent calls.
2. *Difficulty in Catching Offenders:* Enforcement can be challenging as law enforcement often needs to witness the illegal use of fireworks to issue citations or act. Getting to the location in time while the activity is happening can be difficult.
3. *Public Disregard and Resistance:* There is a widespread tendency for people to ignore local fireworks laws, sometimes intentionally or due to a belief that the laws are unnecessary.
4. *Prioritization of Resources:* BFD and BPD have other critical duties, such as responding to actual fires and emergencies. Addressing all fireworks complaints can strain limited resources.
5. *Enforcement Complexity:* Ours is a local ordinance that must be enforced consistently. Factors public pressure and political will.
6. *Safety Concerns:* Encountering individuals using illegal fireworks can pose safety risks for both law enforcement and the public, especially if the fireworks are misused or if confrontations arise.

Considerations:

1. *Public Safety vs. Individual Liberty:* Law enforcement needs to balance enforcing laws designed to protect lives and property from the dangers of fireworks with respecting individual choices and the right to celebrate holidays.
2. *Education and Prevention:* Proactive approaches, such as educating the public about the dangers of illegal fireworks and providing alternatives like professional displays, can help reduce the problem. Better coordination with BFD.
3. *Effective Reporting Mechanisms:* Providing dedicated hotlines or clear non-emergency channels for reporting illegal fireworks use can help manage the volume of calls and ensure appropriate responses.
4. *Consistency in Enforcement:* Failing to enforce fireworks laws can erode the rule of law and lead to broader disregard for regulations.
5. *Use of Technology:* Some areas are using drones and other tools to identify and cite offenders. Exploring the effectiveness and feasibility of such methods can be a consideration.
6. *Community Engagement:* Building trust and communication within the community can be valuable in addressing fireworks issues. Encouraging responsible behavior and highlighting the risks involved can be more effective than solely relying on punitive measures. Create a fireworks hotline. Such a hotline could alleviate such calls to the communications center and keep assets available for other CFS.

Costs for Additional enforcement during the following dates.

June 24 - July 5

December 29 - 31

Fire Department

Regarding preventive enforcement measures for fireworks violations, Fire Rescue is prepared to cover patrols during normal business hours using our current administrative and fire prevention staff. However, to address the critical period when fireworks sales are permitted in the county—approximately June 24 through July 5 and December 29 through 31—I recommend supplementing our coverage through targeted overtime staffing.

Specifically, I propose hiring back four personnel to cover proactive patrol shifts from 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. during these windows. This would consist of two firefighters per patrol vehicle, with one vehicle operating on each side of the river. These teams would focus on proactive patrols as well as responding to dispatch calls related to fireworks violations.

This plan equates to 15 days at 8 hours per shift per vehicle, using two patrol vehicles. At an average overtime hourly rate of \$57.21, the estimated total cost for this targeted enforcement is \$27,460.80. This approach would allow us to enforce a potential fireworks ban effectively or to proactively enforce the current city ordinance, enhancing public safety during high-risk periods.

Police Department

We would have 4 officers on overtime, working 6 hour shifts each day, with the primary focus of preventative enforcement and responding to fireworks calls for service. The actual start/stop times for the shifts would depend on the level of calls for service.

Under the current CBA the total cost for overtime for this time period would be \$25,708.00. However, that total is likely to increase due to existing GFPPA contract in negotiations.

Timeline of Great Falls Fireworks Regulation

State 1985-2019:	The State allowed Consumer/Common fireworks as defined in federal law, except for aerial fireworks.
GF - Pre-1992:	Fireworks were banned in Great Falls by applicable fire code. However, the ban was not enforced.
GF - 1992-1994:	A working group was formed to discuss and come-up with a plan for regulation of fireworks in City limits. At the time, it was observed that enforcement was difficult due to the following: 1) fireworks are sold in the County, which are not legal in the City; illegal use of fireworks within City was common; difficulty in identifying violators; many violators are juveniles; difficulty in educating the public and enforcement personnel as to which fireworks are legal/illegal.
GF - 1994:	<p>The working group came-up with a somewhat complicated ordinance identifying legal and illegal fireworks. The ordinance was fairly restrictive, prohibiting exploding and aerial fireworks (which were likely already banned under state law). The Commission initially rejected most of the proposed ordinance, striking all provisions relating to allowed/disallowed fireworks, but kept the time (5 days) and place limitations.</p> <p>Later in 1994, the Commission revisited the ordinance, and incorporated the previously rejected portion.</p>
GF - 2007:	The Commission substantially revised the 1994 ordinance, modifying permitted fireworks to those legal under MCA 50-37-105, which allowed all “common fireworks” except “sky rockets, roman candles, and bottle rockets.” The new ordinance also reduced the permitted time-frame to 3 days, created a fine structure for violations, and a permit and fee requirement for firework sellers.
GF - 2017:	Ordinance 3158 made minor changes to the City fireworks code as part of a overall revision of Title 9. There were no changes to allowable fireworks.
State - 2021:	The Legislature eliminated the prohibition on aerial fireworks in 50-37-105, allowing all “consumer fireworks” as defined in federal law. The rationale for the change was to be consistent with federal law. However, it should be noted that while federal regs define “consumer fireworks,” fireworks (except for public professional displays) are prohibited on federal, including the District of Columbia, National Parks, National Forests, military installations, and post-offices and other federal offices.
GF - 2021:	<p>Because the definition of permitted fireworks in Great Falls City Code was tied to 50-37-105 MCA, when the statute was amended to allow aerial fireworks, they became legal in Great Falls by default. So, Great Falls currently allows all “consumer fireworks” as defined by 27 CFR 555.11, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ground and handheld sparkling devices (e.g., fountains, sparklers)• Aerial devices (e.g., Roman candles, sky rockets, helicopters, mortars)• Firecrackers (limited to 50 milligrams of flash powder)