



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** MRA Board of Commissioners

**FROM:** Ellen Buchanan, Director *EB*

**DATE:** July 11, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Caras Park Improvements – Request for Funding

The community completed and the MRA Board & City Council adopted an updated Downtown Master Plan two years ago. One of the focus areas of both that plan and the original Downtown Master Plan is the riverfront parks and trails system, centering around Caras Park. Following completion of the Downtown Master Plan, the Missoula Parks Department and the Downtown Missoula Partnership partnered with numerous organizations and agencies, including MRA, to create the North Riverside Parks & Trails Plan. That plan lays out an ambitious vision for Caras Park that will expand the use of the park to year-round, make the park more accessible and available to all of our citizens, upgrade and replace aging infrastructure and expand the types of events and uses that the park will accommodate. The opportunity to joint venture with a City stormwater project and the disruption to the park as a result of the Beartracks Bridge improvements are the primary motivations for this funding request at this time and executing the first phase of park improvements.

In 2015, The City undertook the first phase of stormwater improvements in Caras Park which treat stormwater from a significant area of downtown, a project which has greatly improved the quality of the stormwater discharged to the Clark Fork River. That project was done with the understanding that a subsequent phase would be necessary to achieve our discharge goals. Construction will begin on Phase II of the project this fall. The MRA contributed \$25,000 from the Front Street URD to the 2015 stormwater project, as it has for numerous improvement projects in the park which MRA was instrumental in creating. If the initial phase of the improvements to Caras Park are constructed jointly with the City's stormwater project and while the bridge construction is underway, we can accomplish two goals – a cost saving of approximately \$100,000 and elimination of the need to close the park down again if the two projects are done separately.

The Downtown Missoula Partnership, through the Missoula Downtown Foundation, has committed to raise \$600,000 which would match a City allocation in the same amount. This will be used to fund rebuilding of the amphitheater, adding accessible seating, flattening the hill, widening the trail and upgrading the aging infrastructure, primarily lighting and electrical service. Linda McCarthy, Executive Director of the Partnership, has made a request that

MRA provide \$50,000 in TIF funding to assist in reaching their goal of raising \$600,000. I have attached Linda's letter to this memo for your information. You will note that the letter contains a link to a very informative presentation about the future plans for Caras Park. I would recommend that you take a few minutes to review Caras Park Campaign to get a more complete understanding of the long-range vision and the future investments required over the next decade or so. Linda will attend the meeting and can provide an up to date report about anticipated cost of the project and status of fundraising to date.

You may recall from our budget discussion at the June Board meeting, that there are very limited carryover funds in the Front Street URD and the committed projects in that District will absorb the majority of the funding available. As a result, approved funding for several projects was conditioned on being available when adequate funding became available. This is specifically the case for The Wren Hotel, the Union Block restoration and the Public Library contribution. We will get Certified Taxable Values early next month and anticipate a significant increase in revenues due to the completion or near completion of the AC Hotel, the townhouses on Lavasseur and progress on the Wren Hotel. Also, all of the commercial uses on the ground floor of the Merc Hotel should be fully taxed in FY22. That, combined with the general increase in appraised value that many of us saw with our appraisal notices a month or so ago, should result in a significant increase Front Street URD revenue. That said, staff is recommending that the same condition that was applied to the Library contribution based on availability of funds, be required if the Board chooses to fund this request.

**Recommendation: Staff recommends that the MRA Board approve a request from the Downtown Missoula Partnership for funding for the recommended Caras Park improvements in the amount of \$50,000 with the condition that funding is contingent upon adequate funding being available and payment will be made only after there are adequate revenues available in the Front Street URD and authorizes the Chair to sign the required agreements between the MRA and the Downtown Missoula Partnership or the Missoula Downtown Foundation.**



MISSOULA DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION  
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT  
MISSOULA DOWNTOWN FOUNDATION

May 20, 2021

Ellen Buchanan  
Missoula Redevelopment Agency  
140 W. Pine  
Missoula, MT 59802

Ellen,

Over the last two years the Downtown Missoula Partnership has led the efforts to develop the new [Missoula Downtown Master Plan](#) and the [North Riverside Parks & Trails Plan \(NRSP&T\)](#). With support from a dozen Missoula-area organizations and agencies – as well as more than 6,000 residents who participated in the planning processes – the new vision for the Heart of Missoula has set the stage for our collective actions and investments over the next 10-20 years.

As you know, the Downtown Missoula Partnership is uniting with the City of Missoula to implement some specific upgrades to Caras Park in conjunction with the [Storm Water Infiltration Project](#) this fall. With the opportunity to save approximately \$100,000 and a second construction season in Caras Park, we plan to rebuild the amphitheater, add ADA seating and grass, flatten and improve the green hill, widen the riverfront trail, and upgrade lighting and electrical infrastructure – all in conjunction with improving the quality of the stormwater that is released into the Clark Fork River every day.

As a true public-private partnership with the City of Missoula, the Downtown Missoula Partnership – and specifically the Missoula Downtown Foundation - is working to raise \$600,000 to match the city's contribution of \$600,000 for this Phase 1 project of the NRSP&T Plan. Today, we are halfway there and seeking financial support from the Missoula Redevelopment Agency for these valuable upgrades to Missoula's Town Square. Will you and the MRA please consider a financial investment of \$50,000 for these Phase 1 Improvements? Please visit the [Caras Park Campaign](#) to learn more about the future of Caras Park, and please share with the MRA Board members and staff. Just click on the HEART to start the presentation, and be sure to view the embedded video.

Your investment in Caras Park will benefit all Missoula residents, improve the river corridor, upgrade valuable infrastructure, and ensure our city-center parks continue to be a shining example of our collective investment in the quality of life for everyone who lives here and visits here. Your allocation of TIF funding will help us honor the vision our community set forth for this special place.

Thank you for your consideration. We are available to meet in person or via Zoom to discuss additional details at your convenience. We appreciate your continued support and investment in our collective vision to lead and nurture a vibrant Downtown Missoula as a place where people are inspired to live, work and play.

Warm Regards,



Linda K. McCarthy  
Executive Director



Libby Brunell-Adams  
MDF Board President