

DRAFT - Missoula City Council Committee of the Whole Minutes

November 2, 2022

12:30 PM

Council Chambers (in person) or TEAMS (virtually)

Attend in person: City Council Chambers, 140 W Pine, Missoula MT

Members present: Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, Daniel Carlino, John P. Contos, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, Sandra Vasecka, Heidi West

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

1.2 Approval of the Minutes

1.2.1 Minutes from committee meeting October 26, 2022

The minutes were approved as submitted.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Kevin Hunt made a public comment regarding establishing a citizen task force regarding matters related to ACS.

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

3.1 Proposal for budget amendment to keep the Authorized Campsite (ACS) open until May 31, 2023

Gwen Jones: This is a continued item of business. The rules of decorum were discussed and a reminder to review and follow these rules was given.

There has been a lot of discussion regarding timing of the closing of the ACS. This was an initiative of the previous Mayor and the County Commissioners; this was not something the Council initiated. Sadly, the Mayor passed away from a terminal illness during this time. I acted as an interim mayor, but felt this item needed to be handled by the incoming Mayor, so that is a part of the reason why this item is being addressed now and had not been addressed before.

The Emergency Winter Shelter does not have mandatory drug testing in place, as was commented on last week. The TSOS is the same, with no testing mandated.

Eran Pehan showed a presentation discussing available options in the committee for houselessness assistance. Please see presentation for specific details.

The Council members posed various questions to Eran, many as noted below. For full details on all questions, please see the recorded presentation.

Sandra Vasecka asked if there was any idea as to when the COVID restrictions will be lifted from the Pov, to increase capacity. Eran stated they are watching that and working

with current health officials and are very anxious to have more availability and not have to turn people away in the winter.

Kristen Jordan inquired about food services at the EWS. Eran stated they have bagged lunches and she believed there were some warm items in crockpots, etc.

Daniel Carlino wondered if the ACS is the lowest barrier shelter in the area and a plan for moving it. Eran said she felt it is the lowest barrier shelter, but that the TSOS was also low barrier. She specified they are working on what will be the best option for the ACS going forward, but this is a project involving many partners with many involved.

Amber Sherrill inquired about the Pov's regular capacity, not considering COVID restrictions. Eran felt it was around 150 or so. Amber also wondered about the food provisions. Eran explained that food services are available at the EWS and the Pov. Medical service clinics are also available through Partnership Health and other areas around town. Amber also wondered about the ability to provide the service staff needed to meet the needs of those people.

Mirtha Becerra wondered about the number of sites available at the TSOS. Eran thought it was probably approximately 20 more sites than currently available. The question regarding single/double occupancy at the TSOS was raised by Mirtha. Eran said this information could be determined. A question regarding a pets was asked and Eran said this is always a tricky issue when going into a shelter situation. Foster care for pets by the community is an option currently being discussed.

Stacie Anderson verified with Eran that at the highest capacity night last winter, between all the options available, there was still availability for more people to stay in the shelters available. Eran confirmed this.

Kristen Jordan asked about the options for a nonprofit to take over the ACS or partnering with the City on an ACS. Eran confirmed this, if it meets the necessary zoning requirements, etc.

Sandra Vasecka said Jill from the Pov said that the EWS has one hot meal daily, they are working on two a day and also have hot water, coffee and snacks available throughout the day.

Daniel Carlino asked about the barrier requirements are for entering the different shelters/shelter areas, which Eran discussed.

Gwen acknowledged that there have been safety issues, causing the City not being able to operate this as it should be. Eran confirmed this. She reminded the group that these individuals are in real crisis, which manifests itself in many different ways. A security presence is a part of providing services to people living in crisis and experiencing trauma. This is a reflection on the crisis, not the people experiencing the crisis. This is a very real part of operating a shelter system. Gwen stated for the City to do this, it needs to be done well, the best possible that it can be. Gwen noted she has had discussions that there is a lot of energy toward volunteering by the tenants union. This could be a good resource for help with animals, phones for people who do not have access to one to keep in touch with their medical providers, helping with storage issues, etc. Eran agreed that they have been very agreeable to helping in her discussions with them.

Daniel had a question regarding the security contracts currently in place for the ACS.

Heidi West wondered if with the current staffing level, the intermittent security level would be appropriate. Eran said the City does not feel they can currently operate the ACS 24/7 security with current staffing level or without an experienced operational partner who can bring in 24/7 staffing.

There was clarification of the motion on the floor.

Daniel clarified the motion and that it was referring to using the surplus ARPA funds for funding.

Heidi noted that because the County's agreement ended shortly, this would put all the cost onto the City. Eran said the funding was approved in each of the budget processes through the end of November, so there is no ongoing funding from the County, so this would have to be approved by them.

Kristen noted that the nonprofit currently interested in partnering needed more time, but that there had not been a hard "NO" yet from the County, so may be worth pursuing.

Stacie said Chris Loundsbury from the County was on the meeting and was wondering if he may be able to speak to this.

Chris Loundsbury said the County has not been formally asked and if so, they would need to go through a formal process for a budget amendment and he was unsure as to the Commissioners feelings toward this.

Mirtha noted that if the ACS were to stay open, the current contracts in place are set to expire in November. Eran noted the contract with Rogers International does expire at the end of November. City staff is continuing to help, but have stated they cannot provide the services needed, due to lack of help, unless more help is provided.

Gwen noted it has been challenging to get the appropriate services in place and serviced up to this point and that is not going to go away. Eran agreed. These issues are not a result of the City not trying everything, it has to do with the fact these are the best services they can provide in the situation.

Sandra asked Kristen about the nonprofit and whether or not they would be interested if the City votes no at this time. Kristen felt they still would be interested, but need time to get services in place.

Gwen opened it up to public comment once again.

Kevin Hunt voiced his comments regarding lumping people together, the fact that different people need different needs, pets, and not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

William Specter said all he has heard is individualistic solutions, not those that will affect the group.

No online comments.

Council Comment on the Motion:

Kristen spoke again about the nonprofit and their potential plans and to reach out to them with further questions.

Daniel said that closing the ACS would result in closing the lowest barrier shelter and would affect other community resources and hopes that everyone will listen to the things the residents said during their visit to the meetings.

Sandra said this is a very difficult situation, as these are human beings, but as a keeper of tax dollars, said she does not feel the federal tax dollars through the ARPA funds should be spent on this.

Kristen said this has been heartbreaking and appreciates everyone's time and feels heartbroken that people who will go without services and it is shortsighted to move these people around.

Amber Sherrill - I don't see a plan for what we need for security and staffing to keep this open. The EWS has saved lives. Using our ARPA dollars and not knowing what is going to happen for the future and if we will be able to keep the EWS open isn't sensible. This is a brutal situation to be in.

Heidi - I want to reiterate that this is a temporary option that was propped up and is getting lost in this conversation. This was the first year this was ever an option for anyone. Everyone on the ground learned a lot and what not to do. There needs to be a different model moving forward. We need to trust our staff and service providers who are doing this really hard work every day.

Mike Nugent - I agree that the ACS as it sits now is not a viable solution. Permanency was never the intent. It is easy to say just keep it open, but if something goes wrong down the road, people (as they should) would be back here saying we knew this was an issue, yet we kept it open. This is unfortunate all around. There is no win in this situation. The focus now should be on transition, as the ACS is closing and I motion to Table this motion.

Gwen - Basically we hit pause and readdress in 6 months if needed.

Public comment was called for on this.

Kevin Hunt spoke that there are solutions available and his understanding about what tabling a motion involves.

William Specter said the platitudes do not mean anything if the actions do not reflect it. It is about convenience and optics and dehumanizes these people.

Andi Hoelzel appreciated what Mr. Hunt said about speaking to the reason for tabling this motion, in order to make intention clear. If this gets tabled, no one is publicly accountable for their vote on this motion. Cautioned about going forward with private security firms.

Voted to table the motion. John Contos had to leave the meeting prior to this.

Direct the administration to keep the "Authorized Camping Site" on Clark Fork Lane open and concurrently prepare a budget amendment for the Council's consideration.

Moved by: Mike Nugent

Motion to table the motion "Direct the administration to keep the "Authorized Camping Site" on Clark Fork Lane open and concurrently prepare a budget amendment for the Council's consideration."

AYES: (8): Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, and Heidi West

NAYS: (3): Daniel Carlino, Kristen Jordan, and Sandra Vasecka

ABSENT: (1): John Contos

Vote results: Approved (8 to 3)

4. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 2:20.