

**Missoula City Council Committee of the Whole Minutes - DRAFT**

**March 8, 2023**

**10:45 AM**

**Council Chambers (in person) or TEAMS (virtually)**

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

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

**Members absent:** Stacie Anderson, Kristen Jordan

**1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS**

**1.1 Roll Call**

**1.2 Approval of the Minutes**

No minutes to approve.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

**3.1 Ward Boundaries**

The City Council will hold this public hearing open until they take up the item for final consideration on March 13, 2023.

Council President Gwen Jones made some opening comments. First, a request for council members to ask questions in committee and to hold items in committee if necessary, rather than asking new questions on Monday nights. Second, Missoula already has the largest council in the state and adding additional members is a big question that shouldn't be rushed. Third, Missoula is growing by leaps and bounds and some wards are land locked, so some wards are growing at a different rate than other and ward boundaries will accommodate that. Fourth, some neighborhoods will be split by necessity, and some split wards may receive better representation and services because of it. Fifth, because the council approves their own ward maps, there is a need to be thoughtful and keep in mind the work of staff, rather than being seen as drawing their own boundaries.

Marc Hendrickson, Associate Planner in Development Services, was asked to explain how growth will affect future boundary changes. Marc discussed the Future Growth slide, pointing out that moving Ward 3 or 4 causes a domino effect when pushed south rather than west.

Gwen Jones asked about which Districting Considerations were given primacy, and Marc responded that the population changes and not redistricting a sitting member out of their ward.

Daniel Carlino asked how long it would take to redraw a map based on public comment. Marc responded that it would take over the weekend and the public would have little time to comment before the hearing closed on Monday.

Marty Rehbein, City Clerk, commented that there is not a statutory deadline but it is practical to have the boundaries finalized by when the filing deadline opens for running for council wards. There is no meeting on March 20. There is also the option of an emergency ordinance, which requires a super majority of council members to pass and are only valid for 90 days before further action is taken.

Sandra Vasecka asked what the best practice would be if public hearing only recently opened. Gwen Jones responded that more questions could be asked in committee, checking to see if staff followed the guidelines provided by previous council. The public may not have considered all the factors that staff are asked to consider.

Amber Sherrill commented that maybe council should reconsider timelines in the future. She also commented that she feels strongly that this should be completed before filing opens because those running for reelection need to know what boundaries are when they are running. She commented that due to the consistent growth patterns it is unlikely that citizens will flip flop back and forth, which had been a concern in the past. Amber also commented that, as elected officials, "messing" with the map does feel uncomfortable and like gerrymandering, and she doesn't want to do that or consider adding wards under pressure.

Mike Nugent commented that it's important to remember that staff follow a more processed, analytical approach. He commented that adding wards should be a separate conversation. In the future, maybe the conversation should be started earlier, like in the fall.

Jennifer Savage commented that as a representative of Ward 1 and the Northside Neighborhood, there is a benefit to having Northside-Westside Neighborhood jointly represented, as there is more representation and more eyes on issues. She also agreed that this decision should not be for officials to change the map, but rather to oversee staff who are following guidance.

Heidi West commented that the neighborhood system is different and distinct from the ward system, and that they play different roles. She also mentioned that some public comments have raised the idea of having wards grouped by issues, such as bear encounters, but there is a benefit to having diverse issues in wards. She mentioned that she was looking forward to this map because the decennial census provides better data than the interim building permits model.

Marc Hendrickson spoke to his process of starting the maps and what eventually came before council. The primary concern with proposed alternatives was that they didn't adequately account for future growth and avoid the flip-flopping that would continue to occur.

Sierra Farmer stated that she agrees that neighborhoods having four representatives is beneficial. She agrees that council should have this finalized before the filing deadlines. She reiterated that council works for all Missoula, and residents can reach out to other representatives if they feel more comfortable doing so.

Sandra Vasecka agreed that the council should not be drawing their own ward maps and accused of gerrymandering. She wants to make sure that if we have a public hearing they we should leave time to address citizen concerns. She concurred that we should start this process earlier when possible.

Mirtha Beccera thanked staff for showing the very radical alternative, because sometimes that helps to see the alternatives that were possible and understand the rationale behind the final proposal.

Amber Sherrill appreciated the alternative views as well. She also commented that there are cities that don't have wards at all but have at large representatives. Most decisions are not ward-specific, but rather city wide and councilors can be responsive to all citizens.

Daniel Carlino commented that we should have this discussion earlier in future, but since the legislature may move elections to even numbered years, so this may not end up mattering.

[Second and final reading] (Adopt/Deny) an ordinance of the Missoula City Council amending Chapter 1.16 Missoula Municipal Code, Section 1.16.010 entitled "Division of city into wards" revising and updating ward boundaries based on new population statistics.

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

Adjourned at 11:32am.