

Missoula City Council Housing, Redevelopment, and Community Programs Committee Minutes

DRAFT

September 13, 2023

12:35 PM

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, Kristen Jordan, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, Sandra Vasecka, Heidi West

Members absent: Stacie Anderson

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Committee Chair Heidi West called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m.

1.1 Roll Call

Rhea Sanders called the roll.

1.2 Approval of the Minutes

1.2.1 Approval of the Minutes From August 23rd 2023

The minutes were approved as submitted.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Kim of the ACLU of Montana discussed their recent visit to a homeless encampment that was identified to sweep. They emphasized the legal requirements for such actions. The speaker expressed concern about the city's intentions and actions. They mentioned past incidents in other cities and emphasized the need for transparency and compliance with the law.

Travis Matier, a Missoula resident, and former homeless outreach coordinator of the Poverello Center, recommended a greater focus on the county, particularly its role in managing the jail. He shared his experience of assisting law enforcement in a homeless camp, provided his insights. He expressed his intention to elevate these conversations to national media platforms, emphasizing concerns about the compromised state of Montana.

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

3.1 A resolution of the City Council Commit to Master Planning the Johnson Street Center Property with the Goal of Completing Demolition and Site Preparation of Appropriate Buildings Within Three Years

Ellen Buchanan, Director of the Missoula Redevelopment Agency (MRA), provided a comprehensive overview of the MRL property's history and the city's engagement in its development including the property purchase, park and trail history, the current status of

the Northern Track and the upcoming public planning process to determine the property's optimal utilization based on community input. For Further information, please watch the attached video.

Eran Pehan, the Director of Community Planning, Development and Innovation elaborated on the feasibility of opening a new shelter before demolishing the existing one within three years. Ms. Pehan emphasized the importance of the houseless strategy in identifying the type of shelter and programming needed for the community as well as the need to identify sustainable funding. She expressed optimism that it could come together within three years, but challenges or unexpected barriers could extend the timeline. She commented on the existing council directives, particularly the long and short-term strategies already covered the need for a new shelter. Staff and the community were aware of these directives, so there might not be a need for additional specific directives related to the shelter. The discussion continued with input from other council members.

The committee and Emily Armstrong, the Houseless Programs Manager discussed the following:

- The current Houseless Strategy and the aim to create a new community strategy:
- The plan to secure a firm to facilitate community input in creating the strategy, aiming for a community-driven process with procurement scheduled to open in mid to late October.
- Updates on short and long-term strategies were mentioned, with a focus on community strategy work to address homelessness. The team had been providing updates on various projects over the summer and continued work on strategies, emphasizing the importance of a community vision.
- Short-term work centered on the Missoula Coordinated Entry System, engaging with Built for Zero to make system improvements.
- Extensive efforts on the Johnson St Emergency Shelter and the Trinity navigation center, though they were facing funding and staffing challenges.
- Work on grants and research capacity to expand community engagement.

In the discussion, there was support for the idea of redeveloping the Johnson Street site long-term and sticking to the city's original plan. A committee member raised concerns about the impact of demolishing the existing shelter without a replacement in place, especially since it was the first year the city had a city-funded, full-time, year-round shelter.

Councilman Carlino proposed the following amendment: Be it further resolved, The City of Missoula commits to choosing at least one new suitable site for shelter to replace the community need that the Johnson Street shelter fills before demolition of the Johnson Street shelter starts.

This amendment generated discussion among council members. Some expressed reservations, suggesting that they should wait for the results of the ongoing study to determine the best course of action for future shelter options. They believed that tying the commitment to a specific shelter category might not be prudent at this stage. They discussed that there were already plans in motion and discussions taking place regarding potential shelter options and that the goal of this resolution was to give the Johnson Street neighborhood some peace.

A roll call vote was taken on Councilman Carlino's proposed amendment to the motion. There was 1 yes and 10 nays; the amendment to the motion failed.

Moved by: Daniel Carlino

Be it further resolved, The City of Missoula commits to choosing at least one new suitable site for shelter to replace the community need that the Johnson Street shelter fills before demolition of the Johnson Street shelter starts.

AYES: (1): Daniel Carlino

NAYS: (10): Mirtha Becerra, John P. Contos, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, Sandra Vasecka, and Heidi West

ABSENT: (1): Stacie Anderson

Vote results: Failed (1 to 10)

In response to a request for an update, Montana James, Deputy Director for Community Development in CPDI, explained that the key gap currently was the operational funding to support shelter services and supportive services. They were working on addressing this funding gap and emphasized the need to secure funding before finding a new location for housing these services. Additionally, they mentioned ongoing short-term efforts, such as reopening the Johnson St shelter for the next year and conducting a survey to gather information from individuals experiencing homelessness in the community.

Council members thanked the staff for their hard work and commitment, recognizing the complexity of the situation. They also emphasized the importance of considering the impact on both the unhoused and housed populations as well as the need for regular updates on progress and plans. The resolution was supported with the understanding that funding and operational details are still to be determined.

A vote was taken on the motion that included the friendly amendment of adding “goal” of completing demolition within three years. The motion passed.

Approve a resolution of the city council committing the city to commencing the Johnson Street Property master planning process within one year with the goal of completing demolition and site preparation of appropriate buildings within three years.

AYES: (10): Mirtha Becerra, John P. Contos, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, Sandra Vasecka, and Heidi West

NAYS: (1): Daniel Carlino

ABSENT: (1): Stacie Anderson

Vote results: Approved (10 to 1)

3.2 Amendment to Resolution 8440 to increase the minimum annual allocation to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to \$300,000

Councilman Daniel Carlino introduced a resolution to increase the minimum allocation to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund from \$100,000 to a minimum of \$300,000 from the General Fund each year. He emphasized the importance of affordable housing in the community and the need for the government to create opportunities for permanent stable housing. He argued that the current funding level for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund

was insufficient, considering the high demand for affordable housing projects. For Further information, please watch the attached video.

The committee discussed the proposal and asked questions about its impact on taxes and the source of funding. The Councilman Carlino clarified that the increase in funding would come from the general fund baseline, not through raising taxes. He expressed the belief that the community values affordable housing as a priority and that the resolution would reflect those values by allocating more resources to affordable housing initiatives.

Dale Bickell, Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Missoula provided clarification and emphasized the challenges faced by the city including increasing costs, which were growing faster than the general fund's capacity to accommodate them. He explained that if the resolution were to pass, it would require the city to allocate the minimum amount in the budget for affordable housing. However, raising taxes to meet this requirement might not be feasible, potentially necessitating budget cuts in other areas. A question was asked regarding how the \$100,000 allocation was determined. It was explained that it was initially set as a minimum amount to ensure the trust fund's continued operation. It was intended to support the administrative functions and serve as a baseline funding. Additionally, it was discussed that the allocation could be adjusted if council priorities changed. It was also mentioned that funding could come from various sources to support affordable housing initiatives without solely relying on the general fund.

Kristen Jordan made the recommended motion.

Public Comment:

Bob Campbell, who was running for City Council in Ward 5 opposed the notion of increasing the allocation to \$300,000, citing fiscal conservation principles and advocating for the efficient utilization of existing tools and alternative resources/strategies aimed at promoting affordable housing. They expressed concerns about the funding source for this increase, emphasizing that it ultimately relies on taxpayer dollars.

Committee members expressed a desire to see more funding for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and discussed various ways to achieve this goal without relying on the general fund. They highlighted the city government and council's high prioritization of affordable housing solutions. They emphasized the importance of looking beyond the Trust Fund and considering alternative tools and resources, such as the Missoula Redevelopment Agency (MRA), grants, land sales, and collaborations with community partners. Concerns were raised about the source of funding for the increased allocation, with some members cautioning that it might lead to either property tax increases or cuts in other budget areas. The committee discussed the need to prioritize budget flexibility over setting a fixed minimum allocation. Several committee members advocated waiting to see the funds generated from property sales in the coming year before deciding on the allocation increase. They also expressed concerns about the loss of ARPA funding and the need to address other pressing issues in the budget as well as the need for clear metrics and a comprehensive understanding of program performance. The committee conversed regarding the need to support constituent priorities which include affordable housing solutions. The discussion highlighted the complexity of balancing budget priorities in addressing affordable housing concerns. During the discussion a committee member expressed frustration with the affordability of living in Missoula and urged the council to prioritize affordable housing more effectively. Another committee member

clarified the role of council members and highlighted that housing is a lens through which the council evaluates most things and is part of the strategic plan.

A roll call vote was taken; the motion failed.

The Committee Chair recessed the meeting for 10 minutes.

Moved by: Kristen Jordan

Adopt an amendment to Resolution 8440 to increase the minimum annual allocation to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to \$300,000

AYES: (2): Daniel Carlino, and Kristen Jordan

NAYS: (9): Mirtha Becerra, John P. Contos, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, Sandra Vasecka, and Heidi West

ABSENT: (1): Stacie Anderson

Vote results: Failed (2 to 9)

3.3 Pilot Project – Rotating Authorized Campsites Within Missoula City Limits

The meeting was called back to order at 2:11 pm.

The committee continued the previous discussion regarding the proposed pilot project involving rotating authorized campsites within Missoula city limits. Committee members and city staff had deliberated on establishing criteria and metrics to ensure safety for housed and unhoused individuals at these sites. They also aimed to dispel misleading media reports suggesting campsite locations focused on city parks. Councilwoman Jordan elaborated on the criteria from which sites would be determined including safety and in compliance with local code among other metrics that will be considered. The city's existing approach to homeless encampments had been questioned. City Staff described the process utilized during clean-up activities that may lead to temporarily displacement of individuals for cleanup of the sidewalk or right-of-way with a focus on educating those living outdoors about key areas where it isn't safe or desirable to camp and provided examples. Financial considerations were discussed including staff time, police involvement, and city resources, were addressed, with a request for cost comparisons between camp removals and safe accommodations. Additionally, inquiries were made about the city's response when individuals couldn't access existing shelters, considering legal considerations and shelter bed availability.

Ryan Sudbury, a City of Missoula attorney clarified mixed communication regarding homeless encampments, noting no court case prevented the city from addressing sanitation and safety concerns. People couldn't be ticketed for camping without alternatives but could be asked to move for public health or safety reasons. Challenges in identifying suitable locations for the houseless were discussed, including health department licensing requirements for campgrounds. Liability questions were asked regarding placing toilets, sharps containers, and trash bins in existing camping areas. It was discussed that liability concerns could arise from various factors, with the importance of meeting health and safety standards emphasized. Accessibility, safety, maintenance, zoning regulations, environmental impact, staffing at the potential designated camps,

Health Department regulations, coordination with local authorities, community engagement, private property rights, financial responsibility, and liability matters were all considered essential aspects discussed by staff and the committee. Consulting with legal experts and relevant agencies was recommended before implementing such measures to mitigate potential risks. Eric Legvold, Director of Impact at the United Way of Missoula, provided cost and operating details regarding the Temporary Safe Outdoor Space (TSOS) run by the County. They questioned the data and approaches for other jurisdictions as well as the models they are utilizing to address similar issues.

Councilwoman Jordan made the recommended motion.

Public Comment:

Travis Matier, a 23-year resident of Missoula who worked at the Poverello Center for seven years focused on the need for comprehensive planning and experienced input to ensure the safety and well-being of the homeless population and address potential liability issues.

Bob Campbell, a candidate running for City Council in Ward 5, commented on the proposed rotation of authorized homeless campsites within the city including, the limited suitable campsite locations, public health and safety issues, liability concerns, and law enforcement challenges. He called for clear answers and consideration of various factors in the decision-making process.

Andrea Davis Executive Director of Homeward shared positive developments and challenges encountered related to the Blue Heron Place project and raised questions about how new proposals should be assessed in comparison to existing staff work plans, specifically referring to a safe parking program proposal.

Eric Legvold, Director of Impact at the United Way of Missoula provided the TSOS information requested by the committee including the operational and admin costs, the waiting list numbers and demographics, the number of individuals on-site and the number of residents served.

Various council members and participants expressed their thoughts, concerns, and reservations about the proposal. Some council members were cautiously supportive of the idea. There were also discussions about potential locations for urban camping, liability issues, and the need for oversight, security, and funding. Councilwoman Jones made a motion to table the proposal for further consideration, and this motion was approved.

Moved by: Kristen Jordan

Direct City Administration to identify 12 locations, two in each ward, that are city or private (in partnership with the landowner) property to be used as designated, rotating camping sites. This will require staff to establish and maintain contracts for services including toilets, sharps containers, and trash.

Moved by: Gwen Jones

Approve a motion to table the item.

AYES: (9): Mirtha Becerra, Daniel Carlino, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Mike Nugent, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill, and Heidi West

NAYS: (1): Sandra Vasecka

ABSENT: (2): Stacie Anderson, and John P. Contos

Vote results: Approved (9 to 1)

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:33 p.m.