

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

**October 8, 2025**

**10:25 AM**

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

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

**Members present:** Amber Sherrill, Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, Bob Campbell, Daniel Carlino, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Eric Melson, Sandra Vasecka

**Members absent:** Sierra Farmer, Mike Nugent

**1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS**

**1.1 Roll Call**

**1.2 Approval of the Minutes**

**1.2.1 Minutes from September 17, 2025**

The minutes were approved as submitted.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment available.

**3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

**3.1 IT Department Strategic Update**

Staff presentation.

**Presenter:** Jesse Neidigh, IT Director, Central Services

Mr. Neidigh provided a comprehensive overview of the City's IT operations, marking the first formal IT update since his tenure began three years ago. Key points included:

- **Team Composition & Capacity:**
  - The IT department consists of 16 staff members, including help desk technicians, GIS specialists, procurement, systems administration, and public safety support.
  - Help desk staff support 200–300 employees each; GIS team includes five members with specialized, non-interchangeable skill sets.
  - Limited cross-training and staff absences (e.g., sick leave, family leave) impact project timelines.
- **Scope of Support:**

- IT supports a wide range of equipment beyond standard devices, including specialized technology in police and fire vehicles.
- Staff are frequently deployed across city facilities, contributing to limited availability at central help desk.
- **Software & Licensing:**
  - IT currently manages contracts and licensing for 41 distinct technologies, many of which were previously unmanaged.
  - Efforts are underway to consolidate systems for cost efficiency and improved vendor negotiations.
- **Project Tracking & Prioritization:**
  - A new initiative to document active projects revealed over 60 items, though actual capacity is significantly lower.
  - Projects are now categorized into four areas:
    - Operations (daily functionality)
    - Mandates (compliance and data security)
    - Innovation (new tools and systems)
    - Strategic initiatives

Mr. Neidigh emphasized the importance of transparency and trust in IT decision-making and welcomed questions at the conclusion of his presentation.

Mr. Neidigh expanded on strategic goals and recent project work within the IT Department:

- **Strategic Goal: Shift Toward Innovation**
  - Currently, over 70% of IT staff time is spent maintaining existing systems.
  - The department aims to rebalance efforts to allow more time for innovation and creative problem-solving.
  - Automation and structured workflows are being introduced to reduce reactive work and improve efficiency.
  - Emphasis was placed on thoughtful project intake and prioritization to avoid overextension.
- **Modernization & Resiliency Projects:**
  - **Software-Defined Wide Area Network (SD-WAN):**
    - Implemented redundant internet service providers at remote sites to prevent outages.
    - Most emergency and utility sites now have backup connectivity; one fire station remains pending.

- **GIS Infrastructure Upgrade:**
  - Server and database systems were modernized to support advanced mapping tools.
  - Enhancements benefit public-facing mapping services and internal planning efforts (e.g., downtown planning, code reform).
- **Microsoft 365 & Data Migration:**
  - Ongoing transition to cloud-based tools to improve data access, security, and employee workflows.
  - Supports faster service delivery to constituents and simplifies login processes.
- **Consolidation & Centralization Projects:**
  - **Landline Phone Audit:**
    - Legacy phone systems across city facilities were reviewed and decommissioned where obsolete.
    - New auditing practices established to prevent future billing for unused services.
  - **Amazon Enterprise Account Consolidation:**
    - Individual department accounts were merged into a centralized system.
    - Resulted in significant cost savings and improved financial oversight.
    - IT now maintains a unified dashboard to monitor and tailor procurement activity.

Mr. Neidigh reiterated the department's commitment to transparency, strategic planning, and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Mr. Neidigh concluded his presentation with updates on procurement strategy, mobile infrastructure, and employee experience:

- **Procurement Strategy Enhancements:**
  - Amazon Enterprise account now allows the City to prioritize local vendors and environmentally focused suppliers.
  - IT is working to align purchasing practices with City values and sustainability goals.
- **Cell Phone Plan Consolidation:**
  - City departments previously operated under varied service plans and device models.
  - IT is consolidating into a unified, high-service, unlimited data plan with North American coverage.

- Most departments have transitioned; Parks and Recreation may retain their legacy plan due to cost efficiency.
- **Strategic Goal: Usability & Employee Experience**
  - IT has shifted from reactive support to proactive engagement with departments.
  - A new ticketing system includes service-level agreements and escalation protocols to ensure timely responses.
  - Help desk call routing was simplified, resulting in a 90% live-answer rate and improved first-call resolution.
  - Standardization of hardware (e.g., laptops and docking stations) supports a mobile-ready workforce.
  - Remote work capabilities are being expanded citywide to ensure continuity during disruptions.
- **Security & Accessibility Improvements:**
  - Multi-factor authentication is now required across all city devices.
  - Single sign-on is being implemented to streamline access and improve user experience.
- **Cultural Shift & Capacity Challenges:**
  - IT continues to address ad hoc software purchases that may not align with existing systems.
  - Internal communication and planning are improving, but staff capacity remains limited.
  - The department is working to foster a citywide culture of collaboration and strategic IT engagement.

Mr. Neidigh emphasized the importance of thoughtful planning, proactive support, and ongoing cultural change to strengthen the City's technology infrastructure and service delivery.

Mr. Neidigh wrapped up his presentation with reflections on departmental culture, cybersecurity, and future planning:

- **Cultural Shift & Customer Engagement:**
  - IT is working to shift from a reactive “break-fix” model to a proactive, collaborative approach.
  - Staff are encouraged to engage early with IT to plan solutions rather than request urgent fixes.
  - The department is moving away from a “no” culture toward a “not yet—let’s discuss” mindset.

- Emphasis was placed on thoughtful intake, prioritization, and resource allocation.
- **Cybersecurity Initiatives:**
  - Federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency conducted assessments and penetration testing.
  - Identified gaps are being addressed to strengthen the City's security posture.
  - October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month; staff are encouraged to practice safe digital habits.
  - A grant-funded cybersecurity awareness and training program is being launched.
  - Network and internet traffic monitoring systems have been modernized, with external specialists providing oversight.
- **Data Management & AI Readiness:**
  - Migration to SharePoint is complete; next steps include organizing and categorizing data.
  - Proper data governance will enable safe and effective use of AI tools.
  - IT is evaluating vendor integrations to ensure sensitive data remains protected.
- **Project Intake & Prioritization:**
  - New systems are being implemented to manage project requests and align them with available resources.
  - Staff may experience changes in process, such as formal intake forms replacing ad hoc requests.
  - These changes aim to improve transparency, planning, and execution across departments.

Mr. Neidigh invited Councilors to reach out with questions or suggestions, either during the meeting or at upcoming events. He offered to return to the committee or meet individually to discuss specific topics in greater detail.

#### Council Questions

**Councilor Campbell** thanked Mr. Neidigh for the presentation and inquired about IT support for public safety operations.

- Specifically asked whether a designated IT position is still maintained at the Catlin Street location to address daily issues, referencing prior staffing practices.
- Mr. Neidigh acknowledged the question and confirmed ongoing support.

In response to Councilor Campbell's inquiry, Mr. Neidigh confirmed that the City maintains a designated Public Safety Support Specialist.

- The specialist has an office at the Catlin Street location and splits time between Catlin and IT headquarters to support cross-training and broader departmental coverage.
- Due to the scale of public safety needs, the help desk team is also trained to assist with relevant issues.
- The specialist regularly visits fire stations to address pending tickets and maintain systems.
- While the Catlin office is active, it is not solely focused on police department support.

**Councilor Jones** expressed appreciation for the cultural transformation within the IT Department.

- Acknowledged the challenge of balancing limited resources with high demand.
- Commended Mr. Neidigh and his team for shifting away from a “no culture” toward collaborative problem-solving and bridge-building.
- Noted the department’s responsiveness to Council needs, even for minor technical issues, and emphasized the positive impact on overall city operations.

**Councilor Becerra** thanked Mr. Neidigh for his leadership and acknowledged the complexity of IT operations across a large and distributed city workforce.

- Expressed appreciation for the department’s responsiveness and dedication.
- Noted that Council President Sherrill had joined the meeting and requested her presence be marked.

**Councilor Anderson** echoed the appreciation, highlighting the patience and professionalism of IT staff.

- She noted that staff consistently provide courteous and helpful support, even for recurring or minor issues.
- Credited Mr. Neidigh for fostering a positive and supportive departmental culture.

### **3.2 Amend City Council Rule 11 Allowing Two Public Comment Periods for Items Not on the Agenda**

**Presenter:** Councilor Vasecka (Primary Sponsor)

Councilor Vasecka introduced a proposed amendment to Rule 11 of the City Council Rules, aimed at improving public engagement by adding a second opportunity for general public comment. Key elements of the proposal included:

- **Structure of Public Comment Periods:**
  - Rename “Public Comment” to “Reports from the Public” to reflect a one-way communication format.
  - Add a new comment period immediately following special presentations and proclamations.

- Limit the first comment period to 20 minutes total, with a 3-minute maximum per speaker.
- Allow each resident to speak at only one of the two comment periods per meeting.
- Final speaker may finish if they begin within the allotted time.
- In-person comments take priority; sign-up sheet required on a first-come, first-served basis.
- **Flexibility & Chair Discretion:**
  - The chair may modify the first comment period (e.g., shorten speaking time or reschedule) if a large volume of public comment is anticipated for noticed agenda items, provided advance notice is given.
  - Council responses to public comment remain at the chair's discretion and are not restricted by rule.
- **Rationale & Background:**
  - The change responds to declining public attendance since comment was moved to the end of meetings.
  - Councilor Vasecka cited examples of meetings extending into early morning hours, discouraging participation.
  - The proposal was developed in consultation with the City Attorney, Council President, Mayor, and fellow sponsors.
  - Bloomington, Indiana's model was referenced as a positive example.

Councilor Vasecka expressed hope for majority support and welcomed questions or comments from co-sponsors and other Council members.

**Councilor Campbell** voiced strong support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11, commending Councilor Vasecka for bringing the item forward.

- Recalled the original rationale for placing public comment at the end of meetings—to prioritize staff and developer agenda items—but noted that this change led to a significant decline in public participation.
- Described the proposed 20-minute early comment period as a reasonable and balanced solution that improves accessibility without disrupting regular business.
- Emphasized the importance of public engagement and the flexibility afforded to the chair to manage comment periods based on attendance and agenda content.
- Expressed hope for majority support from fellow Council members and reaffirmed his role as a co-sponsor.

**Councilor Jordan** expressed full support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11 and thanked Councilor Vasecka for leading the effort.

- Acknowledged that while the proposal is not ideal from her perspective, it represents meaningful progress based on constituent feedback.
- Recalled initial concerns when public comment was moved to the end of meetings and noted this proposal as a reevaluation of that decision.
- Advocated for placing all public comment at the beginning of meetings to prioritize constituent voices.
- Emphasized that Council's role includes being present and accessible to the public, even if it extends meeting hours.
- Commended Councilor Vasecka for incorporating diverse input and for inviting her to co-sponsor the referral.

Councilor Vasecka addressed a concern raised by a fellow Council member regarding the early public comment period.

- If no members of the public are present for the first comment opportunity, the item will be treated like any other agenda item without participation—it will be skipped rather than delaying the meeting.
- Residents must be present at the beginning of the meeting to take advantage of the early comment period.

**Councilor Carlino** expressed support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11, describing it as a positive step toward improving public participation.

- Noted that consistent scheduling—such as a 6:00 PM start for public comment—would help residents engage more easily.
- Shared observations of constituents leaving meetings after long waits, underscoring the need for more accessible comment opportunities.
- Believes the change will encourage greater public input and enhance Council's decision-making process.
- Voiced hope for passage of the amendment and openness to future adjustments.

**Councilor Melson** raised several questions regarding implementation and consistency of the proposed changes:

- Asked who would manage the sign-up process for the early public comment period.
  - Councilor Vasecka responded that a sign-up sheet would be placed at the front desk, collected by the officer, and passed to the presiding official. Virtual participants could raise their hand to be recognized.
- Inquired about enforcement if a speaker attempted to comment during both periods.

- Councilor Vasecka clarified that the mayor would intervene if duplicate participation was observed, treating the two comment windows as a single opportunity with a business intermission.
- Asked how the mayor's discretion to relocate the comment period might affect consistency or fairness.
  - Councilor Vasecka acknowledged that discretion could favor certain topics but emphasized that public notice would be required in advance.
  - Councilor Campbell and Councilor Becerra noted that similar discretion has historically been exercised and that transparency and notice are key safeguards.

**Additional Questions from Councilor Melson:**

- Asked whether two comment windows might lead to redundancy and whether relocating the comment period would be more effective.
  - Councilor Vasecka agreed that redundancy is possible but emphasized the value of flexibility for residents with time constraints.
- Proposed a pilot adoption period to evaluate effectiveness.
  - Councilor Vasecka expressed openness but preferred a standard vote and rule change.
  - Councilor Becerra noted that Council rules have evolved over time and can be amended again if needed. A sunset clause was deemed unnecessary; future adjustments could be made through a new referral.

**Councilor Campbell** addressed concerns about redundancy:

- Emphasized that it is up to the public to decide when and how to participate.
- Noted that large crowds typically form around specific agenda items, and the dual comment periods offer flexibility without imposing limits on participation.

**Councilor Becerra** asked whether the mayor had been consulted on the proposal.

- Councilor Vasecka confirmed that she had worked with the mayor, who supported the concept and had no concerns with the final draft.
- Additional public comment guidelines may be posted outside the formal rule change, allowing for procedural flexibility.

Councilor Anderson asked for clarification regarding management of the public comment sign-in sheet, specifically whether the referenced officer would be a police officer.

Councilor Vasecka responded that the process would remain informal and flexible, involving a simple sign-up sheet that could be retrieved by any available person, including herself.

Councilor Anderson indicated she had additional comments and would share them during the formal motion and discussion phase.

With no further questions raised, Councilor Vasecka expressed her honor in formally recommending the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

#### Public Comment

**Mark Corwald**, Ward 3 resident from the Slant Streets neighborhood, expressed support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Suggested using individual 3x5 cards for public comment sign-up to prevent tampering or confusion with a single sign-up sheet.
- Emphasized the importance of public participation and democratic engagement, especially at the local level.
- Acknowledged the challenges and repetition often involved in public comment but affirmed its value.
- Described the proposal as aligned with the spirit of democracy and commended Council for their efforts.

**Chris Kennedy**, Ward 1 resident, voiced strong support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11 and emphasized the importance of public comment in local democracy.

- Criticized the current limitations on public engagement and urged Council to expand the proposed 20-minute comment period to 30 minutes or more.
- Suggested flexibility in the rules to accommodate larger crowds, referencing past meetings with high turnout.
- Expressed frustration with the perceived undervaluing of public input and praised Councilor Vasecka for advancing the proposal.
- Noted that one potential speaker had left due to time constraints, underscoring the need for more accessible comment opportunities.

**T Bone Pleasant**, Ward 1 resident, expressed strong support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Emphasized the concept of enfranchisement, noting that the 20-minute public comment period would empower residents to engage meaningfully in city governance.
- Praised the committee for its sensitivity to public involvement and for fostering a respectful and inclusive dialogue.
- Voiced appreciation for the Council's efforts and affirmed the importance of civic responsibility and participation.

**Mark Kenny**, Ward 6 resident, spoke in support of the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Emphasized the importance of allowing public comment before Council deliberations begin.
- Recalled a past experience watching a City Council meeting where his father-in-law spoke about zoning concerns in the Rattlesnake area.

- Although the Council proceeded with its vote, Mr. Kenny noted that the opportunity to speak beforehand was meaningful and essential to democratic process.

**Travis Mateer**, a 25-year Missoula resident, voiced opposition to the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Criticized the 20-minute early comment period as a symbolic gesture—a “fig leaf”—rather than a meaningful reform.
- Expressed frustration with perceived hypocrisy and lack of genuine engagement from Council, especially when public input challenges predetermined decisions.
- Recounted personal experiences with public comment and emphasized the passion and commitment of residents who take time to speak.
- Shared concerns about meeting structure and content, referencing item 3.1 and the impact of lengthy presentations.
- Urged Council to reconsider the proposal and avoid using it as a superficial sign of public inclusion.
- Closed with a pointed remark about local development and ongoing personal advocacy.

#### Council Comments

**Council President Amber Sherrill** expressed support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11, while acknowledging mixed feelings about certain elements.

- Thanked Councilor Vasecka for her outreach and collaborative effort to make the proposal more reasonable.
- Emphasized that City Council meetings are business meetings with noticed agenda items, and it’s important that staff and scheduled presenters are prioritized.
- Clarified that the amendment does not reduce overall public comment time, and reiterated that Council cannot take action on non-agenda items.
- Disagreed with claims of a noticeable drop in public participation, noting the lack of supporting data.
- Supported the flexibility granted to the presiding officer to relocate or shorten the early comment period when major agenda items are anticipated.
- Described the proposal as a reasonable middle ground and affirmed her intent to support it, while remaining open to future adjustments if needed.

**Councilor Anderson** expressed appreciation for Councilor Vasecka’s outreach and collaborative effort in developing the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Voiced concerns about assigning sign-up sheet management to police officers, emphasizing their role in ensuring safety rather than administering public comment logistics.

- Noted that she had received no constituent complaints about the current public comment structure and highlighted benefits for those required to attend Council meetings, such as engineers and attorneys billing hourly.
- Pushed back on public assertions that Council does not value comment, affirming her commitment to hearing from residents—even during lengthy meetings.
- Raised concerns about the timing of the rule change, given the limited number of meetings left in the current Council term and the potential for a new Council to inherit the revised structure.
- Expressed uncertainty about her vote, citing unresolved concerns about fairness, accessibility for elderly or disabled residents, and the potential burden of navigating two comment periods.
- Reiterated her respect for the work put into the proposal and her desire to balance the needs of all parties who come before Council.

**Councilor Jordan** reiterated her full support for the proposed amendment to Rule 11 and thanked members of the public who spoke in favor of the change.

- Emphasized that democracy is inherently “messy,” and that public comment enriches Council’s decision-making by bringing diverse perspectives.
- Noted a clear reduction in public participation since comment was moved to the end of meetings and expressed interest in tracking that data more formally.
- Advocated for moving all public comment to the beginning of meetings, citing its role in legitimate representation and community engagement.
- Referenced guidance from Robert’s Rules of Order supporting comment periods that align with community expectations.
- Shared a poignant example of a child waiting until late in the evening to present, underscoring the need for more accessible comment opportunities.
- Concluded by affirming her vote in favor and thanking Councilor Vasecka for her leadership.

**Councilor Jones** thanked Councilor Vasecka for her hard work and initiative in bringing the proposed amendment to Rule 11 forward.

- Acknowledged the many existing avenues for public engagement, including committee meetings, phone calls, emails, and comment on noticed agenda items.
- Expressed concern that the 20-minute early comment period may disadvantage less experienced or less nimble residents, potentially creating inequity.
- Highlighted the importance of timely media coverage and noted that moving public comment later in the meeting had helped journalists meet deadlines and report on Council decisions.

- Recognized competing priorities between public comment and media access, and emphasized the broader community value of accurate reporting.
- Despite reservations, stated intent to support the proposal, citing its capped duration and potential for reevaluation if issues arise.

**Councilor Melson** expressed appreciation for public participation and the collaborative effort behind the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Voiced support for the change, describing it as a reasonable and meaningful way to enhance public engagement.
- Emphasized the importance of building trust and transparency between Council and the community.
- Acknowledged the flexibility to monitor and adjust the rule if needed in the future.
- Thanked the sponsors for their work in bringing the proposal forward.

**Councilor Vasecka** thanked fellow Council members and the public for their engagement and collaboration on the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Reflected on her six years of service and emphasized her responsibility to respond to public feedback while still in office.
- Recounted past changes to Council meeting structure, including the shift from 7:00 PM to 6:00 PM start times and the relocation of public comment.
- Noted that the current format has not been working well, based on constituent input and Council discussion.
- Expressed confidence in the proposal and acknowledged that future Councils can revisit and revise the rules as needed.
- Affirmed that Council rules are a living document, adaptable to the evolving needs of the community.

**Councilor Becerra** offered final comments and clarifications regarding the proposed amendment to Rule 11.

- Explained that the original decision to move public comment to the end of meetings was intended to provide predictability for scheduled agenda items and respect staff time—not to limit public participation.
- Emphasized the importance of balancing responsiveness to the public with fiscal responsibility, particularly regarding staff overtime.
- Reaffirmed that Council rules are living documents and should evolve to meet community needs.
- Expressed continued openness to future amendments and improvements based on how the change performs.
- Highlighted additional avenues for public input, including email, Engage Missoula, and direct outreach.

- Concluded with support for the proposal and initiated the roll call vote.

Motion passes unanimously.

**Moved by:** Sandra Vasecka

Amending City Council Rule 11 to allow for two separate opportunities for public comment on items not on the agenda.

AYES: (9): Amber Sherrill, Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, Bob Campbell, Daniel Carlino, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Eric Melson, and Sandra Vasecka

ABSENT: (2): Sierra Farmer, and Mike Nugent

**Vote results: Approved (9 to 0)**

#### 4. **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM.