

City Council Work Session

October 6, 2008

5:30 PM

Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) Tussing, Ronquillo, Gaghen, Stevens, Pitman, Veis, Ruegamer, Ulledalen, McCall, Astle, Clark.

ADJOURN TIME: 6:55 p.m.

Agenda

TOPIC #1	<i>Public Comment</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

There were no speakers.

TOPIC #2	<i>BSEDA Director, Steve Arveshoug</i>
PRESENTER	Steve Arveshoug
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Big Sky Economic Development Authority Director Steve Arveshoug introduced himself and said he wanted to provide his background and what he had been doing the past 30 days since he came on the job. He said he most recently lived in Pueblo, Colorado, where he managed a downtown redevelopment project for the city and county. He said he was also in the water resource development business in Colorado and spent two terms in the Colorado State Legislature in the House of Representatives. He noted that he was a Montana Tech graduate, and his wife was from Anaconda.

Mr. Arveshoug said he spent the previous four weeks trying to learn the community and the roles of his staff and the organization. He stated he also tried to get a handle on current projects -- the GE project, the federal courthouse, as well as the east end TIFD. He said he informed his Board of Directors that he wanted to make himself available to the entire community; County Commissioners, and to reach out to the City and others to work together on strategic planning for economic development. He advised he was also reviewing files and previous projects.

Councilmember Ruegamer asked Mr. Arveshoug if he was aware of the tourist tax being advocated in Helena. Mr. Arveshoug responded that he had not reviewed the proposed legislation yet but was somewhat familiar with it and would get up to speed on it.

Councilmember Ulledalen stated that he was on the selection committee when Mr. Arveshoug was hired. He said the committee discussed getting Mr. Arveshoug out into the

community to broaden his reach and allow the City Council an opportunity to express what he could be doing, what was done wrong or could be done differently.

TOPIC #3	<i>Final Recommendations for MET Route, Schedule, and Fare Changes</i>
PRESENTER	A.T Stoddard, Ron Wenger, and Tom Binford
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Aviation and Transit Director Tom Binford advised the proposed route, schedule and fare changes would be presented. He noted that the proposed changes were similar to what was presented in July. He stated that the final fare adjustments were altered after the public meetings held after the July presentation. Mr. Binford reminded Council that an estimated \$200,000 operating deficit was projected when the planning effort began. He said staff and planners were asked to make service improvements without increasing operating costs. He said they were able to do that, but were also very candid about the financial position during the public meetings. He advised that Council could still hear requests for service increases from constituents during the public hearing. He noted that service improvements beyond the current recommendation could not be implemented without new revenue sources. Mr. Binford said he felt the service improvements would have positive increases. He noted there were positive ridership increases during the last few months.

Consultant A.T. Stoddard advised he would review the process followed over the past year, present route and schedule changes and the fare structure. He provided a PowerPoint presentation. Mr. Stoddard explained on-board surveys were conducted to collect ridership data. He added that they also met with drivers early in the process during the service evaluation. He reported that the cost of providing services was developed as well as service options. He said they heard numerous times that service needed to be extended further to the west end as it was developed.

Mr. Stoddard advised that a random telephone survey was conducted in the community, in addition to a downtown employee survey conducted through the Downtown Billings Association, the hospital and city and county employees. He said the service options were presented at a public meeting.

Mr. Stoddard advised that the draft plan was ready. He noted that the community input opportunities were numerous.

Mr. Stoddard reviewed the proposed route changes – Route 2P Rimrock and Route 6P Lewis. He noted there would be realignment of the Rimrock Route so it would now go in and outbound on Rimrock and eliminated the travel on Poly. He said Route 6P Lewis would no longer serve the College of Technology. He noted that the COT did not lose service because another bus went there at almost the same time. He said the time gained from the Lewis route could serve 32nd Street West to Monad.

Mr. Stoddard's PowerPoint presentation displayed the proposed schedule changes as follows:

- ✓ Rimrock – add morning and evening commute trips; drop the single mid-day run.
- ✓ Parkhill – eliminate mid-day service because of low ridership and reallocate that driver's time to Central (9D).
- ✓ Broadwater – add mid-morning run.

- ✓ Overland – add an earlier trip and drop mid-day trip to focus on commuters to work, especially for Wells Fargo facility employees.
- ✓ Southwest – drop unproductive early and mid day-run and add a mid-morning run.
- ✓ Alkali – drop mid-day run
- ✓ Route 18M, a mid-day service – add an earlier run (commuter run in a.m.) from Heights.

Mr. Stoddard reviewed the proposed fare changes. He explained that three fare options were presented for public input which resulted in a new proposal. He said some input indicated that a slight increase was appropriate. Mr. Stoddard noted that Billings' fares were currently below 10 comparable cities. He said consistent input indicated that large discounts should be given to elderly and disabled riders. Mr. Stoddard reviewed each category's proposed fare.

Councilmember Gaghen said she thought Option 1 was the initial proposal and she had voiced concern about the percentage increase for student passes. She asked if students paid the full adult fare if they only took the bus periodically. Transit Manager Ron Wenger responded that students rode with a student card.

Councilmember Ruegamer asked about MET Plus. Mr. Stoddard explained it was a paratransit program that provided door-to-door service for people who could not use the fixed-route service.

Councilmember Clark asked about the student rate for periodic ridership. Mr. Wenger responded that a student could use a 10-ride pass or pay the regular adult cash fare.

Mr. Wenger reviewed the implementation of schedule changes. He said bids would be accepted for the revised schedule and careful review of the schedule would occur. He noted there were 150 locations to distribute route and schedule books. He said they expected it would take three months to implement the changes. He advised it would probably be late January before the changes were in place.

Mayor Tussing asked when the changes would go before Council. Mr. Wenger advised a formal public hearing and Council action would be held on October 27. He said a recommendation would be presented to accept the route and schedule changes and a resolution would outline the fares

TOPIC #4	<i>Boards & Commissions Report</i>
PRESENTER	Tina Volek
NOTES/OUTCOME	

City Administrator Tina Volek reported that after Council last met on the topic, boards and commissions were asked to evaluate documents sent out. She said several comments were returned and they fell into three categories. She reported the responses as follows:

- Aviation and Transit Board was pleased and had no comments
- Police-related agencies questioned whether Council wanted to require U.S. Citizenship. Ms. Volek said that was currently required. Council agreed the person had to be a registered voter.

- Library Board believed it would be exempt from most of the provisions. An issue was raised whether the board could be active in supporting campaigns. Ms. Volek said the City Attorney would assist with that question.
- Parks Board indicated it was thankful for a uniform approach.
- Planning Department advisory boards asked about the age of applicants. Ms. Volek stated it could be amended to be 18 or older to avoid age discrimination.
- Parking Advisory Board wanted to remove “Central Business District” wording so the Board served the parking needs in the City, not just the business district. She said that required amending Section 2-568 Powers and Duties.

Councilmember Ulledalen pointed out that the funding for the parking enforcement came from the downtown meter collections so expanding their reach left the cost on the downtown area.

Assistant City Administrator Bruce McCandless explained that the parking enforcement officers patrolled the college streets and medical corridor as time allowed. He stated that the Parking Advisory Board mostly discussed parking regulations that affected redevelopment areas outside the downtown area. He said they also discussed the medical corridor and college areas that were not part of their mission for advising changes. He noted that enforcement expansion was not the intention but, with Council’s authority, the Board would have the ability to offer parking advice for the entire City. Councilmember Ulledalen stated that discussion was held years ago in the Highland Park area regarding parking enforcement in the residential areas. Councilmember Gaghen said it was also a recurring item at the North Park Task Force.

Councilmember Veis stated he did not think the Parking Advisory Board needed to expand but was one he felt should be ad hoc to address issues as they arose. Councilmember Gaghen disagreed. She said the group had been on target with issues and there was value in continuity of being aware.

Councilmember Ulledalen said there was a parking issue in the medical corridor as the hospital expanded. He agreed it was important for the committee to remain in place as an ongoing group for continuity. Councilmember Gaghen stated there was potential for increased need in the east end as it expanded.

Ms. Volek Tina asked for a vote regarding expansion of the Parking Advisory Board’s mission to include the entire City of Billings. Councilmembers Astle, Ronquillo, Gaghen and Ulledalen and Mayor Tussing voted in favor of expanding. Ms. Volek said the language would be amended.

Ms. Volek continued with the remaining responses from boards and commissions:

- Public Utilities Board and Traffic Control Board felt the duties of the two boards needed to be defined by Public Works and brought back to Council for discussion.

Ms. Volek summarized the changes that would be made as: members had to be 18 or older and the Parking Advisory Board’s mission would be expanded to address the entire city, not just the central business district. She said that would be brought forward in November.

Councilmember Clark stated the change to the Parking Advisory Board would dictate a need for members from other areas. Councilmember Ulledalen suggested determining a next

logical step such as adding specific areas. He added that there was a meeting sponsored by Greg Krueger about a month ago regarding some general parking issues. He suggested inviting Mr. Krueger to make that presentation on the consensus of that meeting.

Councilmember Gaghen stated she felt the area needed to be reshaped to be more expansive than it was currently, but there may be challenges to being as expansive as the whole city.

Councilmember Astle asked where the Parking Advisory Board members resided. Ms. Volek said a majority of the members were downtown business owners but lived in various areas of the community.

A second vote was taken whether the Parking Advisory Board's territory should include the entire City. Councilmembers Ronquillo, Astle and Mayor Tussing voted 'yes'. Councilmembers Ruegamer, Ulledalen and Clark voted to limit the parking area to areas identified: downtown, hospital corridor, east end TIFD and possibly the immediate south side. Councilmember Veis stated his stance was to eliminate the parking commission. Councilmember Ulledalen said he felt the commission dealt with a lot of downtown issues that the Council did not see.

Councilmember Astle suggested picking areas that had problems that needed solving.

Mayor Tussing suggested polling the three Councilmembers not in attendance. Councilmember Clark stated he would like to hear the reasons for the change from the Parking Advisory Board. Ms. Volek stated that the issue would be brought back to Council after the meeting with the Parking Advisory Commission.

Councilmember Veis asked if there was any talk about eliminating any Boards and Commissions. Ms. Volek responded that none of the Boards felt they needed to be eliminated. Ms. Volek stated there was discussion regarding a couple that could be eliminated; one being the Human Relations Commission and the other was the Ethics Commission, which was more active recently. She pointed out there was a comparable state level agency that could receive allegations of misconduct among government employees. Mayor Tussing pointed out that the Council could vote to eliminate committees through an initiative. Ms. Volek said terms of two members of the Ethics Committee would expire at the end of the year and due to the amount of time they had met recently, it could be difficult to find people to serve on that committee.

Councilmember Veis commented it was a struggle every year to find people to serve on committees and boards. He asked why some still existed and some had the number of members when it was hard to find people to serve on them. Councilmember Gaghen said they served as attempts at public involvement, but it was unfortunate there was not greater participation.

Mayor Tussing suggested allowing committees to die with self attrition. Ms. Volek said she thought it would be possible to do a survey on vacancies held on all committees during the last two years. Councilmember Ronquillo suggested including how many people served on more than one board.

TOPIC #5	<i>Holiday Schedule</i>
PRESENTER	Tina Volek
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Ms. Volek reviewed the holiday schedule for the remainder of the year. She pointed out that a regular meeting was scheduled for November 24, the same week as Thanksgiving, but that meeting was traditionally held. She noted that Christmas fell on a Thursday and a regular meeting was scheduled for the Monday of that same week. She said an option was to cancel the December 15 work session and hold the regular meeting at that time instead of the 22nd. Councilmembers agreed with that change. Ms. Volek said she reviewed that option with Councilmember McCall as well.

Ms. Volek summarized that there would be a work session December 1, and regular meetings December 8 and 15, and no meetings the week of December 22 and 29.

TOPIC #6	<i>Strategic Planning</i>
PRESENTER	Ed Ulledalen
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Councilmember Ulledalen distributed score sheets from the Council's ranking of strategic planning actions. He explained that goals were ranked and he picked the top ten, plotted them on the same sheet previously used and eliminated actions that did not get a vote. He said there seemed to be three general categories: Growth Policies – infill and future growth; Inner Belt Loop – getting it done and how to pay for it; Paying for growth – cost of services, alternative funding.

Councilmember Ulledalen advised that items that received one vote could possibly be put into one of the three main categories. He suggested further refinement by the Councilmembers that had been working on it, and then it would be redistributed to the Council with the idea that it would help provide guidance and direction for the next year.

Councilmember Veis referenced Page 5, Action 6, Inner Belt Loop, and suggested a language change to eliminate encouragement of state funds.

Councilmember Clark stated he felt some of the actions could still be removed. Councilmember Ulledalen reported that six people scored the goals and anyone who still wanted to do it could get them to him and he would add them. Councilmember Veis suggested an established criteria so items were only included if they received a specific number of votes.

Councilmember Ulledalen said they needed to figure out how to make it a viable, ongoing document. He stated that continuity as to where the organization was going was needed. Councilmember Veis commented he felt it was good to keep a full blown strategic plan that noted what was done and what needed to be done.

Councilmember Ulledalen said the recap could be done at the first work session in November.

Councilmember Ulledalen stated that Council should start working on questions to be asked in the citizen survey as part of that process. Mr. McCandless advised that he received responses to the RFP for the survey and the selection would be made by October 23.

Additional Information:

Councilmember Ruegamer provided an update of the League of Cities and Towns legislative meeting in Helena. He said 10 resolutions were developed. Ms. Volek advised she had electronic copies and would email them to Council. Mr. Ruegamer stated that the tourist tax was the main thing discussed and he provided the highlights of it as follows:

- At 3%, Billings would receive approximately \$11.5 million.
- Voter approval was required even if approved by the Legislature.
- Could be enacted by local government.
- Local discretion could tax up to 4%.
- Amount not to exceed 20% would be distributed on a per capita basis to the five regions of the state.
- Not less than 30% had to be used for property tax reduction.
- Taxable items included lodging, camping, prepared meals, etc.
- Collection would be done by local government.
- Up to 2% could be used for vendor allowances.
- Mandatory sunset after 10 years.

Councilmember Ruegamer advised more information would be available when they came back from Missoula.

Councilmember Astle asked when Councilmember Stevens' last meeting was. Ms. Volek stated that she did not submit a formal resignation but stated in an email that her last meeting was October 14. He asked if the application period for her replacement had closed. Ms. Volek advised it closed September 30. Councilmember Gaghen stated she was disappointed there were only five applicants. Ms. Volek explained that a couple of individuals who contacted her received disability compensation and would not be able to serve because of the additional income. Councilmembers and Mayor Tussing said they tried to interest Heights people in applying.

Councilmember Ronquillo asked about the status of the cost of services study. Ms. Volek said the person they have worked with was the only person in the Denver office working on it, but her husband was terminally ill. Ms. Volek said the woman promised to have materials to us the next week. Added that the work in progress was the first phase and the RFP did not guarantee anything beyond the first phase. She stated she would wait to see if the materials arrived as promised and if not, would call the firm and possibly terminate the contract if they do not meet the deadline.

Councilmember Ruegamer stated he felt the contract should be cancelled the next day and started over. Councilmembers agreed that other issues were dependent on the cost of services study.

Councilmember Veis asked about the status of the sexually oriented business ordinance. Ms. Volek advised the ordinance review was scheduled for the October 20 work session.

Councilmember Clark asked about the status of cameras on stoplights. Ms. Volek responded she was reviewing an RFP for it.