

2016 Community Needs Assessment

I. Welcome and Introductions

See sign-in sheet for listing of participants

II. The Purpose of the Community Needs Assessment

- The CNA is a process that reviews the needs of the community as a whole
- It is a required step ahead of applying for funding from the Department of Commerce (see Grant Program Overview handout), and serves as the first of two required hearings on community needs as part of a future application
- The CNA affords an opportunity to discuss the activities the community may utilize to meet any identified development needs
- Areas of need include:
 - Capital improvements
 - Housing
 - Economic development
 - Urban renewal
- The outcome of this effort will be a list of potential projects or actions that will be pursued to improve our community

III. Grant Program Overview

See handout provided by Laura Erikson discussing Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME), and the Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP).

IV. Public Comments

- 1) *Joan Rada (Westside Resident)* → As a Westside resident, Joan acknowledged the need for funding for Phase 1 sewer line installation. She hopes that perhaps only sewer would be worked on first, and then water added a few years later. Joan commented that Westside residents have been very grateful for support received from Commissioners, County and

City Staff, and hopes that TSEP grant funding will come through to support the Westside community.

- 2) *Kris Bakula & Arlene Flynn (West Mont)* → West Mont wishes to receive funding for its Farm and Gardens group home in the Helena Valley. Eight developmentally disabled adults live in the house. They only have 7 bedrooms and share other house space within a building that dates to 1989 that was built by volunteers on donated land. The site is in need of much work, including ADA compliance updates. The building is very close to York Road, with a large culvert running just in front of the home. West Mont received a CDBG grant in recent years for the construction of Ron's Place. Prior to this had invested money in upgrading two homes and they are still working to pay down the loans for those projects. The organization manages twelve homes and 200 employees. It has a 10 year plan for the farm and residence. In speaking with SMA Architects, it will be much more cost effective to tear down and rebuild the home in light of refurbishment needs. They would like to ensure that each resident has a private bedroom for purposes of privacy and health in addition to making necessary upgrades to bathroom facilities and ADA building access needs. A handout was provided with details of work needed, profiles on residents, and schematics for the proposed 10-year plan updates.
- 3) *Gary Spaeth (HCC Chairman)* → Gary had no needs to present. Rather, he came to remind citizens and organizations that all HCC representatives wish to actively listen to the needs of residents in their capacity as the link between the community and the City Commission. They would like to assist in any way they can to better the community.
- 4) *Paul Pacini (HCC)* → Paul stated that Montana, as a whole, is severely lacking in mass transit opportunities within cities and amongst cities, and Helena is no exception. He would like to see some leadership in trying to provide such transportation links, particularly to disadvantaged communities (the elderly and disabled in particular).
- 5) *Dick Sloan (HCC)* → As a representative for the 6th Ward, Dick appreciates the Urban Renewal Plan, TIF District, and train quiet zone efforts in the community. He noted that Central and Bryant Elementary Schools have traffic concern issues. Traffic calming measures would be advisable to ensure safe routes to school for children. He acknowledges that neighborhood residents are often responsible to cover the costs of these measures, but many residents in these areas are not financially capable of covering such expenses. Painted crosswalks on Boulder Avenue are one area that would be beneficial in his estimation.
- 6) *Rep. Mary Ann Dunwell* → Rep. Dunwell would like to add public lighting (and street lights specifically) as an area of interest in creating safe streets. Additionally, she would like to highlight public transportation needs as an area of growing concern. Increased support of

transit for those on low-incomes and those with disabilities will help disadvantaged populations to live independently. She also wonders why we lack a community facility for youth, perhaps behind Memorial Park. She would encourage looking at places for local youth to congregate safely and peacefully.

- 7) *Dick Sloan (HCC)* → Dick commented that there has been much talk about major residential areas in the city that do not have adequate sidewalks, particularly around many local schools (ex: Jefferson). When we talk about City Appeal to encourage people to live in the City, sidewalks are an important issue.
 - a) *Laura Erikson*: Spoke about inventorying sidewalks as part of implementing a sidewalk program. The more households that are involved, the cheaper it is for all residents partaking in the project, cumulatively.
 - b) *Gary Spaeth*: Stated that it is very unsafe for children to walk safely to school or otherwise, particularly in the dark and during winter months.
- 8) *Leslie Torgerson (Helena Housing)* → Helena Housing currently owns 366 units across twenty-eight scattered sites, housing a large percentage of Helena's low-income population. ME Anderson and Stuart Homes are two sites HH operate, housing many elderly people. HH is looking at opportunities to achieve new and improved affordable housing. Their biggest challenge is that most of their current inventory predates the 1980s, with much of it being significantly older. HH owns property on Livingston Ave. that could support up to 13 additional housing units. HH would like to consider a CDBG planning grant to study this project on Livingston. There are scores of people with vouchers seeking housing, demonstrating how great the community's affordable housing needs truly are.
 - a) Leslie later commented that there are 391 people on the public housing waiting list right now. The Section 8 waiting list is 528 people. There are also 90 people looking to use a voucher for affordable housing right now. If these individuals don't find housing within 60 days, the voucher expires (tenant pays 30% of AGI, no more than 40% of AGI when considering total rent, utilities, etc. that comprise housing costs).
 - i) Per *Laura Erikson*, this might point to the need for an updated Housing Needs Assessment.
- 9) *Melanie Reynolds (Lewis and Clark County Public Health Officer)* → Melanie commented that there are many public health issues in our County, as enumerated in the county health needs assessment (copies were provided to those present at the CNA). Notably, LC County has serious issues with pulmonary diseases (ranging from asthma and COPD to lung cancer), high suicide rates, and a greying community (the over 60 population

is anticipated to reach 25% before long). The newly remodeled Michael A. Murray Building houses the PureView Health Center and some of the Lewis and Clark Public Health offices. PureView received funding to update the building and the renovations have displaced many staff to off-site areas. The best option going forward is to update the basement to move staff back into the building. The aging population can find it difficult to access the services, and these satellite sites compound the issue. Tens of thousands of people come in for services annually, primarily low- to moderate-income residents, and access to all services under one roof is vital to their health and well-being.

- 10) *Peggy Stringer (Helena Regional Sports Association)* → Helena Regional Sports Association have a vision of building a site with a community pool, competitive pool, and gym space in the hopes of improving the community by providing a public place to recreate. They would like the facility to be accessible to all, irrespective of age or economic standing. They are in the early stages of raising money, and currently have grant funding for a feasibility study (\$25k-- requires match; have risen up to \$15k thus far). HRSA would like to learn more about the grant process and the opportunities available for such a community facility, although the organization appreciates that the grants under discussion tonight may not be applicable to their present need.
- 11) *Rose Casey (6th Ward Resident)* → Rose's interest was piqued over a future youth center. In her view, it isn't just youth we need to support in the community, but families more broadly (pointed to Casper, WY's center as an example).
- 12) *Alan Davis (Lewis and Clark County Open Space Committee)* → Alan wanted to remind everyone about the importance of open space to community development. The community has acquired much land through private and public funds; however, there are infrastructural needs to connect these areas, particularly from schools to the open land. It is very difficult for children to access existing open land sites. There will be much activity to the west of town that will hopefully improve connectivity to Spring Meadow Lake. The Committee sees this as an important aspect of economic development inasmuch as conservation and the environment.
- 13) *Valerie Wilson (Westside Interim Working Group)* → Val was present to discuss Phase 1 Westside improvements. While that subject was not the focal point of this Assessment, she wanted to thank the city and the county for their work on the TSEP grant on behalf of those in the Westside. She noted that the cost decisions and sequencing decision of the infrastructural improvements are hugely important to residents on the Westside.
- 14) *Mark Luther (Western Montana Railroad Historical Association)* → Mark

remarked on the vast railroad history in our area. WMRHA hopes to see a public facility opened to showcase railway operations and promote the unique history of the rail sector in our town and wider region.

- 15) *Pat Christian (Helena Community Gardens)* → The Helena Community Gardens mission is to establish accessible public gardens for everyone in the city, to provide healthy food, and to help grow community through its efforts. They would like to see better gardens—and more gardens—to promote their mission in Helena.
- 16) *Donna Torgersen* → Donna came to discuss the efforts of two organizations:
 - a) *Historic Preservation Commission* → The Historic Preservation Commission lacks a physical location to serve as an interpretive center for the community's history. Things appear rather of segmented for those who have interests in disparate aspects of the community's history, as evidenced by earlier comments on interest in a history center devoted to rail history alone and there being a state historical museum within city limits. The Commission sees the establishment of a Helena-centric interpretive center as an important focus area for cultural preservation and tourism.
 - b) *Downtown Master Plan* (through the *Business Improvement District*) → Donna discussed the many proposals within current draft master plan. Some noted proposals focus on improving housing in the Downtown Area. Others look to maximize public space usage. She remarked that we do already use the public spaces currently available, but the BID wishes to make them more user-friendly and more open for additional events, while also increasing foot traffic, making the spaces safer for public use, etc. She recommended participants visit www.downtownhelena.com for additional information on the BID and Downtown Master Plan.
- 17) Discussion occurred on other project proposals that were submitted in the form of written comments from: *Guardian Apartments*, the *Center for Mental Health*, and the *Westside Interim Working Group*.

V. Close