County Commission WS Meeting Minutes
April 26, 2022

ANACONDA-DEER LODGE COUNTY
COMMISSION WORK SESSION MEETING
6:00 P.M. TUESDAY, APRIL 26, 2022
COURTHOUSE COURTROOM

Present: District 1 Commissioner Terry Vermeire, District 2 Commissioner Steve Gates,
District 3 Commissioner Kevin Hart (Vice-Chair), District 4 Commissioner Paul Smith
District 5 Commissioner Mike Huotte, CEO Bill Everett and County Attorney Krakowka and Clerk
of Commission Lori Sturm

Members of the Press: No press present

Members of the Public: Per Sign-In Sheet

Commissioner Huotte – Requested to move to item Agenda Item No. 2 first.
  • Commissioner Hart – Agreed

Designation of Polling locations and Election Judges for the 2022 Federal/Primary Elections

Toni Hofland, Election Administrator – The Commission has a list of polling locations that we
would like to have designated for this years 2022 federal primary election. There is one change
to the polling places that have been used traditionally . . . which is the Opportunity Volunteer
Fire Department. In the past that has been the Opportunity Community Club. I have been
informed that the roof and ceiling are unsafe to have the public. The Volunteer Fire
Department generously offered to allow us to use their facility. There is also a list of judges that
we would like the Commission to appoint. They have been through election judge training, a
few will be trained in May.
  • Commissioner Hart – Clarified that The Big Hole residences have been voting in
    Opportunity for the last few years . . . is that correct.
  • Toni Hofland – “Yes”

Place on Agenda

Review of Union and Non-Union Employee Wages (Inflation Index )

CEO Everett – I asked for Department Heads a few members of our community to be here
tonight. I want to brag about what the county has accomplished in the last 4-5 years. The
changes we have made in the community are fantastic. This was done with the support of the
Commission. We worked hand in hand with my administration, department heads and
employees. I am proud of the team that we have. The Department Heads do an amazing job.
They work more than just 8-5 and sometimes 7 days a week, anytime they see that the county
could benefit from their actions. Listed some Departments and what they have done for us.
  • The Health Department – Leigh Ann has built one of the top 5 health departments in
    the state of Montana from scratch. There are 10 employees. There was a time when we
were going to eliminate the health department. We are No. 1 or 2 for Covid shots. They run a very professional organization.

- The Planning Department with Carl Hamming – We have a planning department. The East Yards are being developed, redeveloping things in the community that have gone to blight. We have Code Enforcement, building inspectors.
- Wayne Wendt, Road Department – They are more than the road department . . . they are the do everything department. They have the skills and technicians to accomplish anything. On a Friday night you can find Wayne on a road construction project. If there is a snow emergency . . . you don’t have to call in his team . . . his team looks out the window and are in their trucks heading to the courthouse.
- Paul Puccinelli, Water Department – He oversees the Water . . . but I call him in to examine a contract.
- Courthouse Staff – They provide customer service. They don’t just take your money; they have a smile and talk with you.
- Ben Krakowka and his legal team have done a phenomenal job.
- Bill Sather and his Police Department – The drug crimes that have been knocked down. A drug dealer cannot be comfortable in this town.
- Across the board I am proud of them. Heather Edwards is invaluable to this county. I am bragging and telling you that the county has a great team. These people love the community and are doing a heck of a job.

**CEO Everett** – Now I want to talk about the economy and what has been done. Last year I negotiated with all the unions a 2-year contract at 3 percent. Inflation has run away on us. Look at gas prices, milk, eggs, bread, and housing. The inflationary index came out three months ago at 8.6%. Up from 1.1% to 8.6%. It is out of control. Social Security increased by 6.9% this year. Social Security is using the last economic indicator to increase. Jobless claims last week were the lowest they have been since 1972. We have a huge competition for employees. I want to retain my employees. People are approaching my employees . . . they have approached the police, the planning department and legal team . . . I have all kinds of people trying to grab them. Construction is offering wages that we can’t compete with. We can’t offer what the private market offers, but there is something we can do to at least show appreciation to our employees. We want to retain them. When we go to recruit employees, we are having a tough time. If there is a job opening . . . we are lucky to have 1 or 2 applicants for a county job with great benefits. Three or four years ago we would be looking at a stack of 40 to 50 resume’s.

I am asking the commission to consider these factors: the performance of these people, the economic situation with inflation and the job market. If we could do something to help our employees, it would be appreciated. I would like to see an increase to help our employees. For five years in a row, I have cut mills. I am working on their behalf because I see an injustice. I ask the Commission to consider an inflationary adjustment on all county wages as well as the health insurance. We have the finances in order, this is not spur of the moment. This has been methodically thought out. My department heads are also feeling this pressure from their employees.
The following Department Heads spoke about the concerns: Last November we addressed this issue with the Police Department. They were given a 15% increase. We were having a huge turnover with law enforcement.

- **Bill Sather, Chief of Police** – Moral has increased. Now they are excited and love to be there. Moral is good, we have cars, everyone is happy and has each other’s backs. Thanked the Commission

- **Ben Krakowka, County Attorney** – Has noticed the difference in the moral of the police department. Motivation throughout the ranks. The police department is bringing forward some high-level cases.

- **Carl Hamming, Planning Director** – We have a great team right now. Offered one story about the last 6 months. We were trying to hire a building inspector that has been vacant since October. We finally hired James See. He is working well with the community . . . but it took 6 months to hire that individual. We did interview a couple of times, had some applications or just interest from people. When they found out the salary, they didn’t pursue. The only reason we were able to hire James is that he was told the budget hearing would be coming up in May, adopt a new budget in June, and would try to increase the salary. Anything we can do to show some appreciation.

- **Joe Ungaretti, Parks Department** – Most of my employees are seasonal. We bumped them up to be competitive with the cemetery crew. These guys come to work in bad weather and take care of the parks, in winter they are flooding the rink. A little increase to get them on par with the cemetery has made a difference. They show up and are dedicated. They want better things for the parks.

- **Wayne Wendt, Road Department** – In the last few months we have had a mechanic leave and a teamster. It has been tough to get people to apply. We had only a couple apply. Jordan and Mungus are paying $28 – $30 an hour. We need to be a little more competitive.

- **Tony Hofland, Elections** – We have had a quite a bit of turnover in the office. Most have gone on to other areas. The Accounts Payable clerk who took over my position . . . we had to out twice to get a qualified candidate. Anything you can do . . . I would like my staff to feel appreciated, want to stay and be happy to come to work.

- **Leigh Ann Homes, Public Health** – Showed the commission a plaque received for recognition for exceeding duties to protect the health of the community in the COVID pandemic. The department has 10 positions ranging across the board. We are in competition with the hospital, the state hospital, and Aware for some of the positions. My staff are truly warriors in the public health world. There is quite a discrepancy in their pay right now. Some of the positions, they could make more at McDonalds. My staff has been amazing with flexibility, adapting to new information every day, having to cross train. They have been innovative and creative in increasing vaccination rates. Four of my staff travel to other counties to help with public health departments. They work long hours, stress, provide coverage and they are excited to come to work. The staff care about the community. I have had a nursing position that I was not able to hire for over a year. I would like to keep the staff that we have.
• **CEO Everett** – To Recap the county employees have done a phenomenal job. They make me, the Commission look good. I cannot compete with the free market. The county is in good financial position. We are almost debt free. You are about ready to see a huge insurgence of property tax revenue due to appreciation of new buildings. We have 100 new home sites coming forth. The community is growing. Anything the Commission can do to show appreciation. The goal is that their paycheck today can buy the same number of groceries as it could 12 months ago.

• **Ben Krakowka** – My office is seeing a significant increase in cases. I am constantly in fear that I will lose my attorneys and my support staff. My support staff is expensive and time intensive to train. The loss of one of these people is far more than the loss of their salary.

• **Erin Foley, Secretary Treasurer of the Teamsters Local #2** – Thanked the CEO for working with the unions to protect the jobs in Anaconda. Far too often the workers are seen as a threat to balance budgets. If workers are priced out of their own communities, they face the threat of losing the community we love and the work force that keeps them running. By protecting wages and benefits we protect our loved ones, our neighbors and our jobs. We thank all of you for consideration of this affordable health care and good wages.

• **Commissioner Hart** – The position the county is in is not unique. All municipalities around the state are going through this. We have seen what has happened with Warm Springs. A lot of this was because of wages. A lot of the problems at the prison has been about wages. They just increased correctional staff of $2.00 more an hour. In the next legislative session, the director for the department of corrections has put out a statement . . . that the governor realizes that every position in state government is going to have to be examined for wages. We have also lost correction staff from the prison because they go to other states and can make $20,000 - $30,000 more in other states correctional facilities. It is a national problem that we need to address. If we are going to keep the good employees that we have, we need to do it now.

Place on Agenda

**Ground Transport Services and Lease Agreement between Life Flight Network, LLC and Anaconda-Deer Lodge County**

**CEO Everett** – The Ground transportation Lease, our ambulance. We used to have an agreement with Life Flight to provide interim services. That agreement was not in the best interest of the county, EMT’s or the Fire Department. That contract was cancelled. Our new Chief Eric Brittain renegotiated a new contract. The key to the new contract is the minimal fee that is charged. That minimal fee is $410.00 . . . so that no matter what we do we get $410.00. Now it is the best interest of the county.

Place on Agenda
Request for Appointment to the Health Board by Katie Gruss (Letter Attached)

Leigh Ann Holmes – Katie is interested in joining the Health Board. In reviewing her background, she would be an excellent candidate and has interest in the community. I would appreciate you supporting her.

Place on Agenda

Overbluff LLC’s application for a Major Development Permit for the Alpine Apartments

Carl Hamming, Planning Director - I wanted to update you on this and see if I can gather some feedback. The Planning Board received an MDP application, and it was reviewed in March. There was a recommendation for approval of the MDP to move before the Commission. However, there was a condition of approval with the MDP that would require them to submit a revised parking plan that would adhere to a minimum of one-off street parking space per residential unit.

- Provided overview of the project. A former apartment building. The new developer is looking to put 16 condos in the building. Parking would be an issue with this building. From the onset we said parking would be an issue. We would require one off street parking space per residential unit. At the time they were understanding of this when they acquired the building. Now the MDP has been brought before the Planning Board. All were enthusiastic about the redevelopment goal. The revised parking plan does not adhere to the minimum requirement. This is in the central business development district . . . they would be expected to have commercial business on the ground floor with residential above. They are not looking to do any commercial business this is why they are looking at doing the MDP. Looking for feedback or do you feel the planning department is off base with the requirement to adhere to the off-street parking standard. There was a public hearing before the Planning Board. It received a lot of positive comments. Many business owners and residential neighbors showed up and in favor of the over all project . . . however everyone voiced concerns about parking. Do you have any thoughts for different ideas for flexibility for off street parking plan? The developer did do a lot of door knocking trying to see if there were possibilities for leasing spaces from other neighbors or businesses but had no luck. Should we move this forward to the Commission with a public hearing and allow the parking plan to be considered as submitted or go back to the developer and stick with the original one space per unit. Any thoughts or feedback would be helpful.

- CEO Everett – I have been involved with the Alpine Apartments for a couple of years talking with perspective developers. I was very clear with everyone; we want to develop this building but you have to have adequate parking. They all knew that before they purchased the building, they heard the same from the Planning Department. If you don’t have adequate parking it will be an inconvenience, a nuisance, and a huge problem for local businesses across the street or homeowners that are adjacent. Appreciate what the planning department has done and is 100% on track. My suggestion to the Commission is to keep it in line with what the Planning Department is suggesting.
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- **Commissioner Hart** – Have they exhausted all efforts to find alternatives to parking? Are they looking at a way to further that?
- **Carl Hamming** – They feel they have exhausted all adjacent landowner options. They have listed everyone they have talked to, and it is every adjacent landowner. I am sure there could be outside the box thoughts such as an underground parking garage. The cost of that would be incredible.
- **Commissioner Hart** – I am in favor of the development, and it would be an asset for our community. I would like to see some additional efforts for alternatives before coming to the Commission. To be fair to the businesses and residents in the area, they need to exhaust all possible ideas before this comes to the Commission.

No Action Taken by Commission

**Resolution 22-08 - Boundaries of the Special Improvement Lighting District No. 150. (Daly Addition) (Linden Street, Lincoln Ave, Hayes Ave. and Garfield Ave)**

**CEO Everett** – We are looking at doing road reconstruction, water, and sewer in the Daly Addition. It is one of few areas in our community that does not have lighting. The lighting will be a huge attribute to the residents. Lighting tends to keep problems away. The fees involved will be the same fees that everyone else in the county pays based on a square footage of the house. We don’t try to make money; it needs to pay for the streetlight and the electricity. They are never quite perfect, anytime there is new construction on top of old construction things don’t line up perfect. We work with the engineers, the road department for what is the best overall view.

**Public Hearing Opened at 6:48 p.m.**
- Terry LaValley – In favor of the lighting plan. It involves safety and deters crime. It also deters wildlife such as mountain lions and bears. I understand about adjusting the distances of the lights. . . hope the installation crew can make some adjustments. It will be a good improvement and help with the values of the property.
- Wayne Wendt, Road Department – Most everyone is on board for the lights. We can fudge some of the placement. In the Daly addition there is a 70 foot right of way. About 6 or 7 feet of the grass is in the right of way. On the map the west side of Hemlock is not highlighted. Make sure that is highlighted per the resolution.

**Public Hearing Closed 6:53**

**Public Hearing – Preliminary Plat Approval for the Derzay subsequent minor subdivision/Lost Creek by John Derzay. (The proposed 2-lot subdivision will divide the existing parcel into two residential lots surrounding existing residences. The homes are addressed as 54 Homestead Dr. and 288 Homestead Dr.)**
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Carl Hamming, Planning Director – This is a subsequent minor subdivision that has been in the
works for some time. The Planning Board recommended preliminary plat approval of the
proposed subdivision as it exists with 3 conditions. Mr. Derzay is working on the conditions. This
is a subdivision that draws a property line around 2 existing residences. No new development is
proposed. All adheres to the Lost Creek development district zoning standards. Recommend
approval.

Public Hearing Opened 6:55 p.m.
No public Comments given.
Public Hearing Closed 6:55 p.m.

Special Commission Meeting Following WS

Public Hearing - Preliminary Plat Approval for the Betsy Unit Planned Unit Development Major
Subdivision up at Georgetown Lake by Southern Cross Company, LLC (John Fitzpatrick as agent)
The proposed 23.76-acre subdivision will create 23 residential lots within the Georgetown
Lake Development District.

Carl Hamming, Planning Director – This was another preliminary plat approval recommendation
from the recent Planning Board meeting. As stated, this is proposed to be 23 residential lots out
of 23.76 acres within the Georgetown Lake development district. At the Planning Board Public
Hearing there were no comments received. There was quite a bit of consultation with the
Georgetown Lake Fire District who worked out an extensive plan with the applicant and they
approved the plan as submitted. This will set the standard for a good new model. Planning Board
recommended approval with 6 conditions.

Public Hearing Opened 6:57 p.m.
• Mr. John Fitzpatrick, Secretary/Treasurer of Southern Cross Company LLC – Expressed
appreciation to the Planning Board for processing this application in a timely manner.
Because it is a planned unit development, we have more flexibility with lot sizes. Lot
sizes will range from .5 acres to .95 acres. We will have about 7 acres of green space in
the planned unit development. We are having a central water system installed. Part of
the water system will include a pressurized hydrant system for fire suppression which
will have a 30,000-gallon storage tank. There will be 4 hydrants for fire suppression. We
hope this will be the first of up to 10 developments over the next several years.

Public Hearing Closed 7:00 p.m.

Special Commission Meeting Following WS

Miscellaneous -

Commissioner Kevin Hart: No Miscellaneous.
Commissioner Steve Gates: No Miscellaneous.
Commissioner Paul Smith: No Miscellaneous.
Commissioner Terry Vermeire: No Miscellaneous.
Commissioner Mike Huotte: No Miscellaneous.
CEO Bill Everett: Clarified that the Commission place the increase of wages or do we need to be more specific.
  • Commissioner Hart – I assume we will know more about what we are looking at when this comes forward.
Count Attorney Krakowka: - No Miscellaneous.

PUBLIC COMMENT - No Comments Given.

Meeting Dates

Commissioner Huotte - Read the meeting date and times.
Commissioner Hart – Reminded people that there is special Commission meeting following this meeting.

Adjournment

Meeting Adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Lori Sturm
Clerk of Commission

Mike Huotte
Commission Chair