



LWVHA OBSERVER CORP REPORTS: April 15-21, 2025

LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY COMMISSION - April 15, 2025

Observer Stephanie Wallace attended the meeting in person. All commissioners were present, and the meeting started on time. The agenda clearly described what was to be discussed. There was no public comment at this meeting. The County's procedure to open bids in a public meeting provides public confidence that the contracting process is fair.

ARPA-funded paving work at the County Fairgrounds has already been completed. A bid opening occurred for the 2025 Fairgrounds asphalt supply. This project is a continuation of the ARPA-funded work. The bids are for paving the main entrance road and other areas. There were two bidders for the project: Montana Materials Construction of Helena (formerly Helena Sand and Gravel) with a bid price of \$315,293 and Hoffman's R&M Services of Butte with a bid price of \$310,025. Both bids appeared to be complete, and staff will make their recommendation at the April 29 regular Commission meeting.

Commissioners approved a grant application to the State of Montana Disaster and Emergency Services Division (MDES) in the amount of \$355,124 for night-vision goggles and associated equipment to allow the County SWAT team to better respond to nighttime emergencies. The team currently has only one piece of equipment that is equipped with night vision and cannot be used in many situations because of its size. The County Emergency Manager noted that the Federal grant money that funds the MDES grant program was part of the 2025 Congressional Continuing Resolution and therefore should not be affected by the current Federal budget issues.

LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY COMMISSION - April 17, 2025

Observer Connie Griffith attended the meeting in person. All Commissioners were present, the meeting started on time, and the agenda clearly described what was to be discussed.

Approval of Consent Agenda item for budget amendments for April 2025. The amendments were necessary in order to make money available from the budget to fund the cleanup after the fire at the County Fairgrounds.

Harris Heavy Equipment LLC contract was approved. The company will provide fire cleanup at Exhibit Hall #2.

A resolution to approve tax abatement to American Chemet Corporation for three qualifying Class eight properties was approved by the Commission. The commission approved the resolution for an 80% abatement of Personal Property Taxes on the three Chemet-requested properties to last over a five-year period. The abatement approval includes a 20% phase-out annually until the properties are fully taxable after a ten-year period. The Commissioners stated that the abatement request resolution was approved in order to help the business to continue successfully; generate, provide and maintain jobs; and bring money into the State and the community. Montana Law, under the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 15-6-136, allows for a tax exemption on qualifying Class eight property, specifically manufacturing machinery, fixtures and equipment. The County provided public notice on April 5 and April 12, 2025 on the request. MCA 7-1-2121 requires the two public notices and a public hearing to determine whether the manufacturing machinery, fixtures and equipment eligible for abate has an impact on services and a fiscal impact on the county. According to the County Chief Financial Officer, the April 17th Commission meeting served as the public hearing on the tax abatement request. The Commissioners included in their resolution a statement that the eligible abatement activities will have an impact on services and a fiscal impact to Lewis and Clark County. The abatement application and a copy of the resolution will be submitted to the Montana Department of Revenue for consideration and statutory assessment.

Additional information on Lewis and Clark County commission meetings is available at lccountymt.gov

HELENA CITY COMMISSION - April 21, 2025

Observer Bob Jones attended the meeting in person. All Commissioners, City Manager and City Attorney were present. The meeting started on time and the agenda was available and accurate.

League Position: The LWVHA supports transparency and public engagement and influence in developing policy. The League supports a strong City Commission that is involved in strategic planning for the city of Helena. The LWVHA supports fiscal responsibility.

Progress of the 2017 City Adults with Disabilities Act (ADA) plan description was presented by City Planner Anne Pritchett. Citizen input and availability of the plan online

were discussed. The timeline for ADA compliance by the City was discussed. Commissioner Reed asked how many items there were on the list for ADA and how many have been completed. Planner Pritchett stated there were about 2,000 items in the original plan. She will bring back information to the Commission on how many items have been completed.

The annual chip and seal project bid was presented to the Commissioners by Transportation Director David Knoepke. The only bidder was Helena Sand and Gravel with a bid amount of \$963,505. The bid is slightly higher than last year due to increased costs. Summertime projects have overlays in year one and the seals the next year. The bid was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Request for funds from the City Contingency Reserve Fund: Finance Director Sheila Danielson described the request for funds to pay for an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant golf cart at the Bill Roberts Golf Course. The request, which was in response to an ADA complaint, was for \$20,000 to purchase the cart. Use of this golf cart would come under the same fee structure as other carts at the golf course. Commissioner Danielson stated that this was the first use of contingency funds in her tenure as City Finance Director.

Additional Information: The General Fund provides support to the Golf Fund for the Annual Debt Service on the Club House. This debt came about because of a Limited Tax General Obligation (GO) Bond issued in November 2017. This happened before Director Danielson took over the position as Finance Director. The analysis provided to the Commission at the time of the issuing of the bond was that the revenue stream from the Club House could pay the debt, but this was not the case. The General Fund contribution to the golf course debt has declined over the last few years. More support was provided for the Golf Course during the COVID years. Because this is a General Obligation bond, the General Fund is obligated to pay the debt if the Golf Course cannot. The ADA golf cart is a mandated purchase. Director Danielson states that she has recommended the use of park use fees to pay for the golf simulator upgrades and for a new oven at Muni's restaurant in the FY26 budget. However, the fund needs to bring its reserves back into compliance with the city budget policy, and so far has not been able to do that. The city views the Golf Course as a facility for all residents of Helena to use. Many "non-golfers" enjoy the course for walking, running and cross country skiing.

Resolution to institute a \$40 insufficient funds fee. Director Danielson presented the resolution to institute the fee when citizen payments are returned for insufficient funds. The fee will cover city banking costs. The policy includes an appeal process procedure which will be communicated in the insufficient fund mailing notification to the citizens.