



# OBSERVER CORPS REPORTS

December 17, 2024 to January 9, 2025

Meetings observed by members of the League of Women Voters of the Helena Area

## HELENA CITY COMMISSION – December 18, 2024

**Observer Clare Kerns** attended the administrative meeting by zoom.

The agenda was available and accurate. The meeting started on time. Mayor Collins and City Commissioners were present. Commissioner Reed attended the meeting by Zoom. Acting City Manager Petty was present.

**Canyon Ferry Reservoir:** Commissioner Shirliff received comments of concern from the public related to dead birds in the city drinking water reservoir Canyon Ferry. Public Works Director Ryan Leland provided information to the commissioners on the treatment process for city drinking water and provided assurance to the commissioners that the final treatment of water with Chlorine made it safe to drink. For more information, contact Director Leland, Public Works Dept. 406-447-8430

**Computerization of City Records:** Significant progress has been made in computerizing city processes, records, applications, and documents. The public can access the city website and obtain a lot of information. Computing city work enhances productivity and collaboration and ensures security and accuracy. It also provides transparency, accountability and ensures customer service, and there will be cost savings for the city.

**Special Event Application Online:** A new streamlined Special Event application form for city events can now be completed on the city website. Anyone can access and see what events are being planned and which have been approved.

[https://www.helenamt.gov/community/special\\_events.gov](https://www.helenamt.gov/community/special_events.gov)

## HELENA CITY COMMISSION – January 9, 2025

**Observer Clare Kerns** attended the meeting by zoom. The Mayor and City Commissioners were present. Mayor Pro Tem Emily Dean attended online. The agenda was available and accurate. The meeting started on time.

**Helena Citizens Council:** A Council representative provided a briefing to the Commissioners. The Citizens Council is discussing recommendations and will be presenting them to the commissioners when they are completed.

**A Representative of Montana League of Cities and Towns** provided information and a pre-meeting packet to commissioners on legislation that they are tracking. The information was not available to the public. The League tracks legislation that may be of interest to Montana local governments, develop talking points and help them take positions on legislation. There is information on the city website related to property tax reform, housing, environmental regulation, retirement compensation, public safety, Medicaid expansion and Military operations in Montana. League Observer Kearns accessed the recommendation documents on the League of Cities and Towns website. Here is the link: <https://mtleague.org/advocacy/advocacy-positions>.

## **LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY COMMISSIONERS – December 17, 2024**

**Observer:** Stephanie Wallace attended the meeting in person.

The agenda for the public meeting was available and accurate. The meeting started on time. All commissioners were present. There was opportunity for public comment.

**Grizzly Gulch Placer Mine Reclamation:** Bids were opened by the County purchasing officer who briefly reviewed the contents of each bid with the commissioners. It is a county policy to always open bids in a public setting which allows for public participation.

**Partnership with the City of Helena:** The commissioners considered a partnership with the City of Helena for a \$4,577,605 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant application for solid waste infrastructure for recycling. **LWVHA Position:** *The application provides for the use of alternative sources of revenue and intergovernmental sharing of management and maintenance of facilities which the League supports.*

**Second Hearing Preliminary Plat:** Commissioners held their second hearing to consider approval of a preliminary plat and variance requests for the Wade Minor Subdivision which consists of four residential lots and one commercial lot. The discussion was a continuation of the first public meeting held on December 10, 2024, which was a hearing for a variance request to allow the Wade Minor subdivision to use an off-site source of water in the Frontier Village subdivision for fire protection. The West Valley Fire Department supports this proposal as providing adequate capacity for both the Frontier and Wade subdivisions. The Wade Minor subdivision would participate in the Frontier Rural District (RID) and thereby help pay for the system. Individual wells and septic systems will serve the residential lots

The Commissioners discussed land use planning and growth as well as well and water issues. Additionally, they covered septic systems and storm water management, subdivision planning, water quality and quantity, traffic, and infrastructure. **LWVHA**

**Position:** *The League strongly believes that growth should occur in ways that do not cause dangerous or unhealthy impacts on citizens, the environment and the public infrastructure in the area and that taxpayers should not be responsible for funding cleanup costs for irresponsible development.*

**Public Comment:** The public did not attend either of the two meetings. However, a number of people commented prior to the December 10 meeting with a focus on potential impacts of the 5-lot subdivision on area water quality and availability.

Commissioners were reminded by county staff that although this is a minor subdivision request, they must make a determination about potential impacts on local services.

**LWVHA Position:** *The League supports a comprehensive strategy for growth that makes water quality a prime priority.* **Topics discussed by the public:** Commissioners summarized how the staff findings and conclusions addressed the concerns raised by commentators.

- 1. The water situation in the valley** commenters expressed concern about water availability associated with the additional well development. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) are responsible for approving the application.
- 2. Wastewater Impacts were identified:** The systems will need to be approved by the DEQ and the County Health Department.
- 3. Nitrates** are a concern in the area and covenants will need to recommend that homeowners regularly test their wells.

The preliminary plan was unanimously approved by the Commission. The developer has three years to comply with conditions and submit a final plan for approval

## **LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY COMMISSIONERS – December 19, 2024**

**Observer Connie Griffith** reviewed the video of the public meeting.

The agenda was posted before the meeting and clearly described what was to be discussed. All commissioners were present. The public had the opportunity to comment during and at the end of the meeting.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** County purchasing officer Casey Hayes provided information on the MOU renewal between the county and the Montana Department of Administration for cooperative purchasing. The agreement provides the County with an opportunity to save money on goods and services that the state has solicited. The Memorandum was approved.

**Extension of Final Plat Development Plat: Community** Development staff presented a request for a one-year extension requested by the property owner to provide a final plat for developing Seymer Park. The process has been going on for three years and includes an alley abandonment as part of the final plat. Commissioners approved a six-month extension.

## **LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY COMMISSIONERS – December 31, 2024**

**Observer Connie Griffith** attended the public meeting in person.

The agenda was posted before the meeting and the agenda clearly described what was to be discussed. All commissioners were in attendance and the meeting started on time. Commissioner Hunthausen was sworn in for a new six-year term of office. Commissioner Candace Payne was designated Commission Chair for 2025. The meeting lasted three hours.

**Awarding of Bid:** As part of the first phase of the County wide Master Plan on Growth Development, the Commissioners awarded Dick Anderson’s bid to replace and relocate the Fueling and Magnesium-Chloride systems. The county will be using money from three sources of funding for the project.

**Support Actions:** The Commissioners took several actions to support and help fund Suicide Prevention Services and the LOSS Program (Suicide Support) and the Regional State Opioid Education and Naloxone (Narcan) Distribution Program.

**Extension of Subdivision Regulations Program.** The Commission extended the deadline for the Subdivision Regulations Rewrite Project to 8/3/2025. **LWVHA Position:** *The League encourages public participation in all planning processes for infrastructure review and zoning districts.*

**The Lincoln Valley Collaborative Public Lands Management Proposal** (Lincoln Prosperity Project) was taken into consideration. The project includes designating several acres of public land by the unincorporated community of Lincoln as Wilderness Area. A number of people testified against the action. The Commissioners postponed the decision on the project from 2024. This was the second hearing on the proposal which was supported by the community during the first hearing.

**Public Comment:** Several people commented that they had only two days’ notice about the Lincoln Prosperity Project before they had to respond. They became aware of the project when it appeared on the agenda for the Commission meeting.