



OBSERVER CORPS REPORTS

January 16 to January 30, 2025

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

HOMETOWN HELENA - 1/16/2025

Observer Mary Harlow attended in person.

Teen Services Librarian Emmon Rogers, Lewis & Clark Library Teen Advisory Group Leader, introduced six teens, ages 15 to 17, at the Hometown Helena meeting. This core group of teens provides support and information for the library's teen services. The teens agreed that the library provides a safe place for them where they can meet and make new friends. A new teen book section in the library is being filled with the graphic novels that they enjoy. With the help of Emmon, the teens started their democracy project in January. A topic will be chosen, researched, and presented to legislators during the current legislative session. All the teens spoke highly of Emmon and her support for them.

HOMETOWN HELENA - 1/30/2025

Observer Mary Harlow attended in person.

New Congressman: Congressman Troy Downing, serving his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives representing Montana's second congressional district, attended the Hometown meeting. Representative Downing is one of 60 first-year representatives in the House and has been assigned to the House Financial Services Committee. His Helena District Office is located at 7 West 6th Avenue, Suite 3B, phone 406, 502-1435.

Crime Stoppers: Shawn Whitewolf informed attendees that the Crime Stoppers organization needs a board member. If you would like to serve, please contact Helena Area Crime Stoppers.

CITY COMMISSION MEETING - 1/22/2025

Observer Robert Jones attended the administrative meeting in person. The agenda was available in advance and was accurate. The meeting started on time, all City Commissioners, City Manager, and the mayor were present.

Taste of City Drinking Water: Commissioner Shirliff received more complaints about the taste of city drinking water. (This is the second commission meeting in January that commissioner Shirliff brought citizen complaints on the water taste and odor problem to the Commission meeting.) Director of Public Works Ryan Leland explained that the Helena Reservoir, which relies on Missouri River water, is classified as a "nuisance" taste. There is no danger associated with this

classification. The new water filtration system should mitigate this issue. The project at the water treatment plant is projected for completion on May 1, 2025.

Helena Citizens Council did not provide a report.

New Fire Station: Fire Chief Campbell stated that the progress of the new, bond-funded Fire Station slated for building at the northwest corner of Kelleher Drive and East Custer Avenue, has made it through the RFP process. An architect was chosen from ten applications. (For more information on the contents of the Request for Proposals/Qualifications for professional services for fire station go to <https://helenamt.gov>.)

Sidewalks: Sidewalk Variance Request and Appeal at 1208 LaGrande was discussed by Director Knopke. The owners of the property were there and offered their version of the request and the appeal. A decision will be made at the Monday January 27th city meeting.

A Review of **City Engineering Standards** by City Engineer Ryan Leland was presented to commissioners. Engineer Leland told commission they will likely be asked to approve a cost recovery fee for engineering studies as part of the development application process by developers. All other cities in Montana currently have such a fee.

HELENA CITY COMMISSION MEETING - 1/27/2025

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

Sidewalk and Ramp Improvements: The City commission unanimously voted to accept an Americans with Disabilities Act Grant for improvements to ramps and sidewalks. Commissioners Dean and Reed requested that the goal of one hundred sidewalk repair projects be prioritized.

Transit System upgrade: Commissioners Shirliff and Reed requested a presentation on transit system upgrades at a future administrative meeting was requested.

Railroad Crossings: Commissioner Logan requested information from staff on the wait time at rail crossings since BNSF railway took over and whether the five-minute maximum time for halting train traffic, required by city ordinance, was being followed. Commissioner Dean suggested that the National League of Cities be consulted as they may have a committee that could provide the City with information on this topic.

Helena Citizens Council: Robert Hoffman, District 5 Representative, reported on Zoom the Citizens Council was developing a recommendation regarding flooding on Broadway Street. The same Citizens Council officers were re-elected for 2025.

Proposals for Community Development Grants: City Grants Administrator Opitz reported the opening of Grant proposals for the City Community Development Grants. There is currently \$67,000 available for grants of between \$500 and \$4,000 each.

Sidewalk Variance Appeal Hearing at LaGrande and Cleveland Streets: After a long discussion of both the case and the City's new policy of leaving variances to staff, with appeals to the Commission, the motion to deny the appeal was passed 3-2. (This was the first appeal request to make it to the commission under the new policy.)

Building Demolition using Tax Increment Funds (TIF): Commissioners voted unanimously to use TIF funds for the demolition of the Stockman's building at Last Chance and Lyndale. A new five-story bank building will be built at that location. The Board of Adjustment had approved the use of city funds for the demolition. The TIF board is short of members and has not reviewed the request.

League Position: *The League of Women Voters 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 League supports fiscal responsibility.*

LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING - 1/09/2025

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

Grizzly Gulch Reclamation Project: The commissioners approved a memo of understanding with the Lewis and Clark Conservation District to match landowner costs for planting vegetation in the reclaimed Gulch area. The Grizzly Gulch Placer Mine Reclamation project is being funded with coal tax revenue. As part of the project, the floodplain will connect the creek to the floodplain and restore its water quality

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL MEETING - 1/22/2025

Observer Mary Beth Linder attended the meeting in person. The agenda was published on the city of Helena website. The meeting started on time. Eleven members were present and six attended by zoom. Twenty-two of the twenty-eight-member council positions are currently filled. The seventeen members provided a quorum.

Election of Helena Citizens Council (HCC) Officers for 2025: At the beginning of the meeting, Anne Hausrath was sworn in as a new representative for District 2. Anne is a member of the Helena-Area League and Local Government Committee. HCC officers were re-elected to their current positions. Ben Kuiper will serve as chair again for 2025.

Chair Update: Chairperson Ben Kuiper attended a Hometown Helena meeting and spoke to encourage membership in the CC members to participate in early department budget processes. A prior city manager had allowed HCC members to sit in on preliminary department budget meetings. City budget issues will be laid out by March. (*The City Charter Article IV, Section 4.01, Neighborhood Councils, "Operating independently from the City commission or city officials, the Helena Citizens Council shall review and recommend actions relating to the annual budget and make recommendations relating to future development of the city."*)