

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**February 3, 2026 -- City Commission Work Session**  
**Civic Center, Gibson Room 212 -- Mayor Reeves Presiding**

**CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM**

**ROLL CALL/STAFF INTRODUCTIONS:**

City Commission members present: Cory Reeves, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, Shannon Wilson, and Casey Schreiner.

Also present were City Manager Greg Doyon and Deputy City Manager Jeremy Jones; Deputy City Attorney Rachel Taylor; Finance Director Melissa Kinzler; Public Works Director Chris Gaub, City Engineer Jesse Patton and Project Manager Carter Storrusten; Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry; Acting Fire Chief Jeremy Virts; Police Chief Jeff Newton; and, Deputy City Clerk Darcy Dea.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Donna Williams**, City resident, suggested that the City's website contain a heat emergency plan. Ms. Williams commented that she will email the Commission the materials she discussed tonight.

**Ben Forsyth**, City resident, commented that two weeks ago he provided the Commission copies of 32 laws that are currently being misused and creating harms. He is concerned that the Commission will not discuss marijuana issues.

**WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. DOWNTOWN DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS – PHASE 3**

Public Works City Engineer Jesse Patton reported that Central Avenue from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 4<sup>th</sup> Street will need to be closed during the Phase 3 improvements and the scope has increased to replace the watermain and redo the road.

Mayor Reeves received clarification that the improvements would begin summer 2026 and completed winter 2026.

Josh Sommer, Great West Engineering, Inc. reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included:

- Presentation Outline:

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- Project history, purpose and original scope; updated scope of project; summary of alternatives considered; public outreach approach; cost estimate; schedule.
- Project History and Purpose:
  - Downtown stormwater improvements identified in 2020 Drainage Basin Study and 2025 Stormwater Master Plan.
  - Goal is to address frequency and severity of flooding in Downtown area.
  - Improvements separated into 4 Phases: Phase 1 completed in 2023 and Phase 2 completed in 2025.
- Original Phase 3 Project Scope:
  - Replace and upsize 3<sup>rd</sup> Street North Storm Drain from 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North to 2<sup>nd</sup> Alley North.
  - Replace and upsize 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North Storm Drain from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North to 4<sup>th</sup> Street North.
  - Replace and upsize 2<sup>nd</sup> Alley North Storm Drain from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North to 4<sup>th</sup> Street North.
- Updated Scope of Work – Phase 3
  - Central Avenue Storm Drain – upsize and add parallel line from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - New 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North Storm Drain from Central Avenue to 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North.
  - New 4<sup>th</sup> Street North Storm Drain from Central Avenue to 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North.
  - New 5<sup>th</sup> Street North Storm Drain from Central Avenue to 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North; from 2<sup>nd</sup> Alley North to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North.
  - Water Main Replacement – Central Avenue from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 4<sup>th</sup> Street; 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North from Central Avenue to 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North.
  - Street Reconstruction – Central Avenue from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 4<sup>th</sup> Street; 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North from Central Avenue to 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North.
- Reason for Project Shift to Central Avenue:

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- Storm Drain replacement in alleys would be very difficult, high risk and costly. Existing fiber optic, gas, sewer and power would all conflict with a new alley storm drain.
- Storm Drain replacement/upsizing in Central Avenue provides the greatest return on investment. Eliminates roughly 12,000 square feet of concrete surfacing removal and replacement. Allows for the replacement of deteriorating crucial water main. Area is also in need of a street reconstruction. Reduced overall construction time.
- Summary of Alternatives Considered:
  - Six alternatives identified to minimize work in Central Avenue. Great West Engineering recommends Central Avenue alternative because it reduces overall downtown construction closure time and maximizes the amount of storm drainage benefit for cost.
  - Recommended alternatives selected as most beneficial. Both 1<sup>st</sup> Alley North and 2<sup>nd</sup> Alley North are too congested for storm utility work. Saving approximately \$500,000 by reducing work on side streets. Opportunity to replace aging water main and reconstruct roadway as part of the improvements. Contract documents limit closing of Central Avenue to ½ a block at any one time (except for paving at the end of the project).
- Public Outreach Approach:
  - Public Hearing TBD – end of February to beginning of March.
  - Presentation to Business Improvement District.
  - In person meeting and ongoing coordination with Downtown Association.
  - In person meetings with each business.
  - Distribute letters to businesses and stakeholders for updates.
  - Bi-weekly construction meeting with stakeholders invited – successful on Phase 2.
- Schedule Phase 3:
  - Notice to proceed – Summer 2025.
  - Survey/Investigation – Summer 2025.
  - Design – Summer 2025 to Winter 2025/2026.

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- Public Outreach – Fall 2025 to Fall 2026.
- Bidding – Spring 2026.
- Construction Admin – Summer 2026 to Fall 2026.

Commissioner Tryon inquired about the public hearing to be determined from the end of February to the beginning of March and vehicle and pedestrian traffic for the half a block during the construction phase.

City Engineer Patton responded that the public hearing is a public outreach meeting to receive input from the downtown business district, business owners and community. There would be no vehicle traffic for a half a block; however, there would still be east to west traffic to allow pedestrians to walk to downtown businesses.

Commissioner McKenney commented that he appreciates that a half block will be done at a time and speed during the construction phase is the most important thing for small business owners.

Commissioner Wilson inquired about the condition of the road prior to laying asphalt.

City Engineer Patton responded that it would be a gravel road until the asphalt is laid; however, it will be accessible and vehicles will be able to drive on it.

**2. GREAT FALLS AGRITECH PARK UPDATE**

Great Falls Development Alliance (GFDA) President and CEO Brett Doney reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included:

- Creation of Rail Industrial Park a Long-time Economic Development Priority:
  - North Park developed in 1970's.
  - First GFDA effort was in North Industrial Area in early 2000's – spent over \$400,000 but never controlled land.
  - AgriTech Park effort re-started in 2007 driven by Montana Specialty Mills needing a new site.
  - Tried for two years to work with private developer in North Industrial Area – aftermath of MaltEurop rail funding – developer sued GFDA.
  - GFDA a reluctant last-resort developer to create a rail industrial park for the Great Falls region – changed relationship between City and GFDA.

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- Strategic Priority:
  - Place: Business Sites and Spaces – increase availability of functional business sites and spaces.
  - 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Corporate and 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Consultants Surveys: What Business Leaders and Consultants are saying about site selection.
  - Land Availability – Tier for 1<sup>st</sup> place.
  - Amy Gerber, Executive Managing Director, Business Incentives Practice at Cushman and Wakefield – “For economic development, when there is a shortage of quality real estate (with infrastructure) and high demand, it creates a cost structure that only the largest projects, such as a data center, can absorb because the land is such a small percentage of the total project costs. Projects that are small to mid-sized have a far greater sensitivity to these costs, especially since they are upfront costs. The challenge for economic development, what type of project best supports the community’s goals and how do you get political alignment and strengthen the tools to support those projects.”
- Park Timeline Key Dates:
  - 2002 – GFDA begins effort to get someone to develop a rail park.
  - 2009 – Park Task Force site search.
  - 2010 – 10-Year Option on 196 acres.
  - 2012 – Earmarks used to bring water and sewer to 196 acres.
  - 2013 – Annexation and subdivision approved; TIF District created.
  - 2015 – Development agreements approved.
  - 2016 – Grand opening of Park.
  - 2017 – Montana Specialty Mills groundbreaking.
  - 2019 – First TIF Reimbursement.
  - 2028 – TIF district expires if not extended by bond.
- Park Development has been Public/Private Partnership.
- Park Progress to Date:

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- Earmarks and City match were used to extend water and sewer to Park.
- Infrastructure phases 1 and 2 constructed - \$4,526,012.
- BNSF Premier Park certification.
- Eight businesses have purchased sites in Park – Five have built facilities:
  - Montana Specialty Mills; Pacific Steel and Recycling; Helena Chemical; FedEx Ground; Ponderosa Solutions; Steel Etc.; Best Oil; Admiral Beverage.
- Park pivotal in site competitions for companies including ADF.
- Land purchased by GFDA.
- Limited Rail Sites in Region: Extension of North Park; Montana Specialty Mills; Helena Chemical; FedEx Ground; Ponderosa Solutions; Admiral Beverage.
- Available Park Sites:
  - Lot 1: 58 Acres, for sale by Pacific Steel and Recycling.
  - Lots 7-10: 61 Acres, only available if Phase 3A infrastructure is constructed – estimated cost \$1.6 million.
  - Large Parcel: 186 acres (158 acres in City zoned 1-2).
  - Ponderosa Solutions wants Lots 7 for expansion.
  - Knight Swift wants Lot 10 for new facility.
- Importance of Logistics for Manufacturing:
  - Great Falls manufacturers need more competitive freight logistics facilities and services.
- Park Financial Status:
  - Phase 1 and 2 infrastructure reimbursements total \$2,930,921: balance remaining \$1,595,091 and of this, \$880,959 is loan capital which GFDA could put to work in other businesses and developments.

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- Estimated cost for Phase 3A road, water and sewer is \$1,600,000, bids are due February 4<sup>th</sup> and Phase 3A is part of the existing Development Agreement.
- Bond would pay-off balance remaining and Phase 3A infrastructure: City staff estimates over 1.8 debt service coverage ratio assuming no new development in Park; bond terms to be determined by City; As new developments move forward, City would have additional revenue captured by TIF District.
- GFDA has paid City \$537,025 in property taxes and road assessments since start of project.
- Proposed Next Steps:
  - City issues bond for balance phases 1 and 2 and phase 3A.
  - GFDA constructs phase 3A infrastructure.
  - Sell lot 7 to Ponderosa Solutions.
  - Sell lot 10 to Knight Swift.
  - GFDA lists lots 8 and 9.
  - Large lot used to pursue major projects.
  - Continue to use Park as attraction tool for Great Falls.
  - Potential for future annexation and infrastructure requests – Existing TIF District cannot be expanded, but new TIF District could be created on annexed land.
- Benefits to City:
  - More competitive freight logistics for Great Falls manufacturers.
  - Two more lots available to attract private investment.
  - Return loan capital GFDA can invest in other projects.
  - Continue to use Park as attraction tool for Great Falls.
  - Continued public/private partnership success.

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Commissioner Tryon inquired if GFDA is asking the City to issue municipal bonds to pay for the infrastructure phase developments in AgriTech Park, if it would help GFDA break even and what GFDA would use the money for if Ponderosa Solutions and Knight Swift purchased the lots.

Mr. Doney responded that the revenue bond would be similar to what was issued in Westbank Landing and the payment on the bond comes from tax increment. Mr. Doney hopes to break even on the overall project and pay off the debt that was borrowed on the land. If it gets to the point where GFDA breaks even, it could be reused in other economic developments. If the TIF district runs out in 2028, GFDA would not expect to be fully reimbursed for money that has gone into infrastructures and would take a loss on that. The infrastructure costs are far more than the cost per acre that companies are willing to pay for the land.

With regard to the “Creation of Rail Industrial Park a Long-time Economic Development Priority” slide, Commissioner McKenney, inquired about “GFDA a reluctant last-resort developer to create a rail industrial park for the Great Falls region changed the relationship between the City and GFDA”.

Mr. Doney responded that there was a conflict of interest when there were two City Commissioners that served on the GFDA board.

With regard to slide four, Commissioner McKenney inquired if the development of the industrial park could affect encroachment on Malmstrom Air Force Base (MAFB).

Mr. Doney responded that the type of development could affect encroachment on MAFB; however, GFDA controls the site, is in contact with MAFB and would never do anything that would have a negative impact on MAFB.

Mayor Reeves noted that Mr. Doney had provided MAFB with an update similar to the presentation tonight and there were no concerns from MAFB about the future of what is going on at the site.

Mr. Doney mentioned that companies looking to locate on this site must be United States owned or cleared by the United States Treasury to ensure that we do not end up with somebody who wants to hurt our country.

With regard to the “Park Financial Status” slide, Commissioner McKenney inquired if GFDA actually paid the City \$537,025 in property taxes and road assessments since start of project or if that is recaptured by the TIF district.

Mr. Doney responded that the road assessment goes to the City and the property taxes are captured by the TIF district.

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Commissioner Tryon commented that if the City were to issue a revenue bond to GFDA, he will need to know if there is any risk to the City, what GFDA's responsibility would be and why the City should risk issuing bonds to GFDA.

Mr. Doney responded that the money would go into public infrastructure and is similar to what has been done with Westbank Landing. GFDA started this request three years ago and the City's bond counsel was not comfortable then with regard dot the risk; however, recently, there has been more investment going on out there. GFDA does not want the City to take any risk and needs the City to be successful.

Mayor Reeves explained that City Manager Doyon would report back to the Commission with regard to Commissioner Tryon's concerns and questions.

Commissioner McKenney commented that he likes the concept of TIF districts, they are used to develop non-producing areas, are an economic development tool and used to clean up blight; however, retiring a TIF district takes a long time for the financial reward back to the City. The public has a hard time understanding when the City needs to ask for a levy and has successful TIF districts.

Mr. Doney responded that the cost keeps escalating beyond the revenue escalating. There is a lot of encouragement in the Growth Policy to build within and GFDA has been trying to encourage development of enclaves and housing instead of all growth out. There is little existing industrial space and a need to extend on the edge of the City when it comes to heavy industrial. The goal is to not need tax abatement and the Commission's role is to protect residents by carefully looking at every proposal of an incentive and deciding long term if it is in the best interest of the City, taxpayers and residents to make that investment.

**DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS**

City Manager Greg Doyon reported that there will be a budget presentation after the Commission hears from all the departments. He will work with staff and GFDA to answer some of these questions so GFDA can bring this application before the Commission at some point.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of February 3, 2026 at 6:42 p.m.