

Mayor's Downtown Advisory Commission

Minutes ~ June 6, 2011

Commission Members in Attendance: Jason Wiener (City Council), Rod Austin (Downtown BID), Rob Scheben (Police Department), Keenan Whitt (homeWORD), David Pierce (Salvation Army), Brenda Desmond (District Court), Ellie Hill (Poverello Center), Susan Hay Patrick (United Way), Margaret Borg (Attorney), Melinda Mason (WMMHC), Leanne Vreeland (St. Patrick's Hospital), Keithi Worthington (City Attorney), Ginny Merriam (City of Missoula)

Commission Members Absent: Barbara Berens (County Auditor), Dave Strohmaier (City Council), Leslie Halligan (County Attorney), Julie Hilley (Owner, MKLauren), Laurie Johnson (Downtown BID), Nick Roberts (Food Bank), Eran Fowler (Poverello Center), Melissa Gordon (OPG)

Others In Attendance: Daniel Viehland, City of Missoula Communications Intern

Introductions and Welcome: Ginny Merriam called the meeting to order.

Public Comment: None

Approve minutes for May 2011: None to Approve

Crime and Prevention- Keithi Worthington and Rob Scheben

Keithi said they are looking at alternatives to the current punishment for "bad behavior" downtown. The current punishment is not working because the homeless folks can't afford to pay the fines and just ignore them. There are no real consequences for this. They talked to Sue Wilkins from Missoula Correctional Services, and she suggested a community service program. There are two possible options for this program. One is to set up a community service satellite office downtown. The other is to find room for an office for the program at the Mullan Road Detention Center. The Mullan Road location would cost \$70,000, and the downtown location would cost \$100,000. Both plans have downsides. The Mullan Road location is far from downtown, and the city may have to provide transportation. The second issue is that many of the homeless carry their belongings and their dogs with them. The office would most likely need a kennel and lockers to handle this problem. Two other potential problems include finding a funding source and getting the judges to go along with the plan.

The program would probably offer a choice of community service or 30 days in jail. The Community Service Program probably wouldn't work without some form of concrete option to encourage the participants to be willing to do community service.

There are two steps to take. The committee members need to meet with the judge and mayor. The judge isn't available for a while, so they are meeting with they mayor first, scheduled for June 9. Ginny said it was her understanding the judge didn't want to participate in a community service program like this and asked if that had changed. Keithi said she didn't know. Margaret said the judge had two issues. First of all, he didn't want to set up a program in which the homeless had to pay for their community service hours. Secondly, he had issues with the current, operating community service program.

There was discussion about how many people this program would handle and how many days they would work. They don't know how many would actually use the program, but they were figuring on a six person crew because that was as many as can be properly supervised. The program would possibly be running every weekday for six hours a day. How much would the program would cost per person? Would it be cheaper than jail. This population is high risk, and the county would be on the line for hospital costs when homeless people were in jail. They would really have 3 choices: community service, jail or leave Missoula. How many days of jail are we paying for now that we wouldn't have to pay for under this program? Very little, as in the current system there is no provision for jail

time. There has been \$900,000 in unpaid fines. This is a program to change behavior. The goal is to have the best bang for our buck in creating a deterrent to aggressive panhandling, panhandling on a roadway, etc. Not only is the county on the line for medical expenses when people are in jail, but the jail is mostly full of people who committed serious crimes like robbery. In order to create an effective deterrent, we have to threaten their lifestyle. A few days in jail may seem like no big deal to them, but if they might lose their belongings, animals and camping spot, the deterrent would be more effective. There are low level offenders racking up high fines.

Could they immediately have people do community service after their appearance in court? Also, is it possible to create incentives to work, by doing things like offering to pay them if they work a certain number of hours? Some members objected to paying them cash, but maybe using food vouchers. There is also a possibility of contracting with other entities, like the Highway Department.

Keithi gave some numbers concerning the number of tickets handed out downtown. You can see her if you want to look at those. Right now you can sleep on the sidewalk in a downtown area. There was a question about whether we change that. You have to be careful when not allowing people to linger downtown so we are not targeting customers.

Should the commission wait until the summer 2011 numbers were available before taking action on this. Members were interested in the distribution of the tickets, and how many were repeat offenders. It's an election year and people should decide if they want homelessness to become a leading campaign issue. Keithi said she will try to put that information together, but it will take her a while.

The program has to be part of a package, with the community service and jail time options, to work. The ambassador numbers show the ordinances have not worked. How many hours would be given for each fine? That has not been decided yet. What other courts were doing for community service?

The ticket numbers will probably stay this high or even higher for a while before they decline. More numbers are needed and the commission should see at least one more summer's numbers.

Real Change Promotion – Ginny Merriam

Ginny said the downtown cop, bike officers and real change radio spots should make a dent in the problem. The Poverello received a grant to create Homeless Outreach Teams, or HOT Teams. The teams will try to help people access services, monitor to ensure ordinances are being followed and clean up garbage left over from homeless people, such as blankets. The Real Change program is reallocating their money to this program. The Real Change funder is getting impatient at not seeing results. We see a pull between trying to get tough on the bad behaviors downtown and staying compassionate. We can have a stronger message about bad behaviors downtown.

Members discussed if they should try to help the funder be more involved, but Ginny said he didn't want to participate in that way. Ellie said to some extent she thought the funder was right. She said we now have the three legs of the stool, government, non-profits, and private businesses. She suggested we could do something to unveil the teams on the day of caring. Ginny said we have \$3,000 from the BID for the radio spots. Bob Tutskey is working for free to make the Real Change ads. Sheila Callahan of Mountain Broadcasting is donating studio time, and the campaign is making new posters and labels for the cafes.

David asked what the measuring rod would be, how would we quantify success? Everyone agreed to do the HOT Team rollout on the United Way Day of Caring on June 17.

Respectfully Submitted

Daniel Viehland

Date of Next Meeting

Jack Reidy Conference Room

July 5, 2011