



## **PUBLIC MEETING**

January 22, 2015

Minutes

The Lewis and Clark County Commissioners Public Meeting was held on January 22, 2015, at 9:00 AM in Commission Chambers Room 330.

### **Roll Call**

Chairman Andy Hunthausen called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Commissioner Susan Good Geise was present. Commissioner Mike Murray was excused. Others attending all or a portion of the meeting included Eric Bryson, Michele Peterson-Cook, Greg McNally, Jim Wilbur, Ron Alles, George Thebarga, Al Knauber, and Nichole Nisbet, Recording Secretary.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

Everyone recited the pledge.

### **Consent Action Items**

Commissioner Hunthausen reported that there are no consent action items.

### **County Growth Policy Update. (George Thebarga)**

George Thebarga, Community Development and Planning Director, presented the County Growth Policy Update. The plan was last updated in 2004 during a development boom. The plan set forth the goal to establish plans for 6 regions of Lewis and Clark County. Currently 95% of the Counties population is in the region of the Helena Valley. During the last decade the County has approved over 6,000 units of housing.

The key points are outlined by the growth and development trends. Key point number 1 states that the Helena Valley Planning Area contains 95% of the counties population and has experienced 98% of its development activity over the past decades. Key point number 2 states that the population growth has been focused in small areas of the valley that have changed from rural to suburban and urban densities. Those areas will continue to grow and urbanize. Key point 3 states that estimates of growth over the next two decades is that about 10,000 people will move into Helena valley and build 4,000 new housing units. Key point number 4 is the assessment of the current growth policy calling

for the County to manage growth to establish urban, transitional and rural areas with development plans to guide orderly growth. Key point number 5 states rather than managing growth according to the Growth Policy, that the County has let the State DEQ determine development densities. Key point number 6, states that the current Growth Policy is inadequate and ineffective to properly manage growth that is happening in Helena Valley.

The five key issues are one, water availability, as there are parts of Helena where there is simply not enough water in the aquifers to sustain the level of development that has been occurring. Two, wastewater management, as the wastewater goes back into the water supply through the same aquifers the drinking water comes from. There is a need to provide active oversight and management of aging septic systems. Continuing the individual septic system maintenance program, expanding it to include non-municipal sewer systems and extending Helena's municipal sewers are all keys to accommodate future growth while protecting ground water supply. Three, road conditions and congestion, as much of the road network of the Helena Valley planning area was not designed to accommodate hundreds of new subdivisions with thousands of homes, and there are no resources to rebuild them. The County has no effective long range or short range tools to respond to the needs of the road network to accommodate future growth and development. The County needs a system in place to maximize the efficiency and accommodate the projected growth. Four, fire protection, as areas of high and high-to-extreme fuel hazards represent a constraint to development in the wild land urban interface. As the population density in the Helena Valley becomes more and more suburban and urban in nature, the demand on the volunteer rural fire departments will increase, and the nature of the calls will change. Volunteer rural fire departments must protect a population the size of Helena scattered over 400 hundred square miles with less than 200 fire hydrants or water pumping sources. Poorly designed high density subdivisions with narrow streets and small lots exacerbates the difficulties for rural volunteer fire companies. Five, floodplain development, as development in flood prone areas is expensive, costing millions in damages during floods, and millions to mitigate in order to reduce damage. Developing suburban and urban densities in areas prone to flooding is not a good strategy. Current regulations do not prevent development in areas subject to flooding in severe storm events.

In conducting this update to the County growth policy, the planning board and staff have provided multiple opportunities for public input. The board, staff and consultants took a multi-pronged and multi-phase campaign to maximize public input into the preparation of this report. A survey was mailed to over 10,000 addresses in Helena Valley. A total of 2,977 surveys were returned with a response rate of 29%. A third of those included written comments. Public participation included meetings with 13 stakeholder groups and consultations with individuals from 3 more. Roads were a top issue with people.

The recommendations of the 2004 Growth Policy for Helena Valley have had little if any effect of the development that occurred here over the past decade. There are five major constraints to new development that must be addressed in the Growth Policy to ensure that growth can continue in an orderly and safe manner. The County needs a new way of doing the business of managing growth that addresses future costs and consequences of ignoring the development constraints. Public investment in water and wastewater systems,

road improvements, and fire services could address the development constraints, but it is expensive and there are risks to the public investors. A combination of public investment, zoning, improving subdivision regulations and education is needed to effectively manage the growth. Growth Policy goals include: effectively responding to the development constraints, provide multiple policy options, flexibility to meet market needs and offer trade offs.

The City of Helena and the County have a memorandum of understanding to work together on facilitating development in areas where there are facilities and services to make it cost effective to accommodate high levels of development. The outcome from the City and County urban standards boundary work session being held next week will be incorporated into the Growth Policy update.

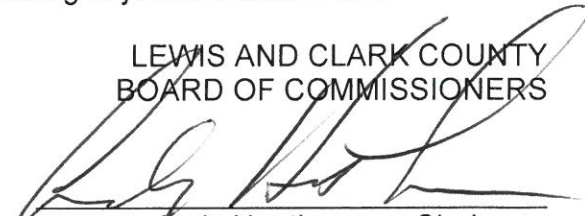
No public comment was received.

**Public comment on any public matter within the jurisdiction of the Commission that is not on the agenda above.**

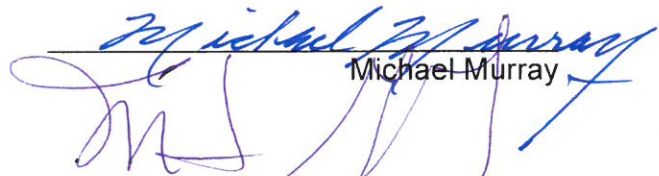
**Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:49 am.


LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Andy Hunthausen, Chairman

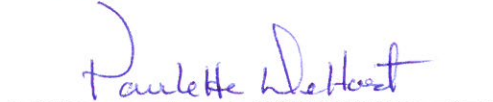


Michael Murray



Susan Good Geise

ATTEST:



Paulette DeHart, Clerk of the Board