



*Helena Civic Center*  
*PO Box 272, Helena MT 59624*

**CIVIC CENTER BOARD**

**SPECIAL MEETING**

Tuesday, July 23, 2019 at 4:00 PM in the lobby

**AGENDA - SPECIAL MEETING**

1. Roll Call; Call to Order
2. Discussion of proposed ordinance change that would move the Helena Civic Center division from the Community Facilities Department to Helena City Parks and Recreation Department
3. Moving of Civic Center Administration and Management out of the Civic Center building
4. Discussion of board letter to the Editor of the Independent Record
5. Public Comment
6. Adjourn

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(406) 447- 8490; TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711

[citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov](mailto:citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov)

316 North Park, Avenue, Room 440, Helena, MT 59623

July 11, 2019

CITIZENS OF HELENA, BE ALERT!!! We fear that our CIVIC CENTER is under siege by the very persons we have elected to watch over the City of Helena and protect us and the assets of the City. In spite of the fact that, under the new budget, Civic Center funding is a mere 1.6% of the General Fund for the fiscal year 2019-2020, the building and its operation has been singled out for scrutiny. In the new budget it will cost more to operate the City pool for 10 weeks than to operate the Civic Center for 12 months. In spite of the fact that the Civic Center Board has raised over TWO MILLION DOLLARS in the past 20 years alone and spent over 47 years renovating and upgrading the building, there is no respect for the history of the building or the recommendations of the hardworking and dedicated advisory board.

“I’ve served as President of the CIVIC CENTER ADVISORY BOARD for over 40 years, and I have never felt that this majestic old building, which is on the National Registry of Historic Places, is more threatened than it is with the present City Commission and City Manager.” (Judy Kline)

The CIVIC CENTER ADVISORY BOARD has for 47 years been appointed by the Mayor and the Commission to advise the City Commission on matters pertaining to the building. The advice of the Civic Center Advisory Board has always been accepted and heeded with gratitude for our well-researched and carefully considered recommendations. That is certainly not the case today, as the City Commission (5 members) (and now the City Manager also) have chosen to disregard the advice of the board’s 17 members on more than one occasion.

City Manager Cortez has proceeded to countermand a City Ordinance which created the Community Facilities Department with the Civic Center under that department. On April 27<sup>th</sup> (just 4 days after our President hand delivered the Civic Center Board’s Letter of Recommendations to the City Clerk for disbursement to the Mayor, the Commissioners City Manager Cortez announced that she was placing the Civic Center under Parks and Recreation in direct contradiction of one of our specific recommendations, and in direct violation of the City Ordinance (No. 2867) that created the division on January 25, 1999. How shortsighted, to place the Civic Center under the purview of a NEW Director of Parks and Recreation, whose forte is open spaces and parks. What qualifications does this unsuspecting NEW hire bring to the operation of an event venue? We fear that it’s a deliberate setting up of the Civic Center for a failure that will result in the building’s falling into disrepair.

When this happens, we fear that the City Commission will find the repairs too costly, and the building will slide down a slippery slope to oblivion.

Ms Cortez has also told members of the Civic Center Board that it is her intention to explore all possibilities, including “privatizing” the building. Privatizing will most certainly mean increased costs to use the building and decreased service, both of which will be out of the hands of the citizens of Helena, as the City Commission will no longer control the destiny of the building. When this option doesn’t work, the slope to oblivion will mean closure of the building. Is this really what the users of the building and the general public want? This option was reviewed more than 2 years ago after a \$50,000 study, at which time the Civic Center Board and the City Commission did not feel it was a good idea. We are not sure what has changed. We fear it’s another push down the slippery slope! It is the Civic Center Board’s recommendation that the Civic Center operation remain a function of the City of Helena. Because of the unique character of the building, the welfare, maintenance, appearance, and future of the Civic Center cannot be placed in the hands of a private organization or company, or a non-profit organization that has no experience or historical knowledge of the building or the Helena area. The Helena Civic Center is a cultural treasure and community arts center FOR THE CITIZENS OF HELENA, and it needs to remain under the operation of City Government to keep its future in their hands. This cannot be accomplished by persons or entities who don’t have a vested interest in the cultural assets and arts entities in the City of Helena.

It is also the Civic Center Board’s recommendation that the Civic Center Division remain under the purview of the Community Facilities Department. It is our opinion that no other department has the personnel with experience, knowledge, and desire to support the Civic Center building and its operation to the level that the Community Facilities Department can.

We’ve heard on a couple of occasions that the “Civic Center doesn’t have much going on there”. Nothing could be further from the truth! There is something going on in the ballroom almost every weekend, and the auditorium events have grown since the Civic Center manager is allowed more latitude in dealing with users of the building. We’re thinking this perception ORIGINATED with the City Commission when they opted to spend \$50,000 for a “study”, only to determine that what the Board and Staff were doing were the “best practices” for the use of the building, and only a small tweak to the rental and management rules might be helpful for users of the building. These changes have been made, and it has freed up the management to work collaboratively with patrons.

PAY ATTENTION HELENA!!!! We elected these people to govern our city. We expect that they will DO NO HARM and that they will respect the rule of law. We must hold them to the high standards of those who have honorably served before them or replace them as elections make other candidates available. Transparency is key, and it has been in short supply of late in City government.

#### CIVIC CENTER ADVISORY BOARD

Judy Kline, President; Joann Christnacht, Vice President; Brad Culver, Treasurer; Tim Andridge, Steve Crider, Mike DaSilva, Skip Hatveldt, Bridget Holland, Riley Johnson, Bonnie Lorang, Kathleen Pace, Trevor Parrish, E. Rick Schlenker, AIA, Craig Wilkerson, MD