

**WHITEFISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION
O'SHAUNANCY CENTER
"STATE OF THE FISH"
WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2015, 7:00 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER

Ken Williams called the meeting to order. Members present were Rebecca Norton, Turner Askew and Vanice Woodbeck, secretary. There were 27 people in the audience.

INTRODUCTION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION

Ken Williams introduced the Local Government Commission and explained that this is their 1st Public Hearing. He said the committee has discussed going back to wards, having an ombudsman and also do some cleaning up of language in the Charter. Tonight they would like to hear from the different agencies and citizens on their thought of how the city is doing and their government.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kevin, from the Chamber, said we got through the recession and we have pretty much recovered. We have a very strong tourism, real estate construction is up. Their concerns are the labor force having housing as it is expensive to live and work here.

Dylan Boyle, CVB, said they work very hard to make Whitefish a year round destination. He said they are very proud of how they have promoted Whitefish. The visitor's for Whitefish, Glacier Park and Whitefish Mountain have continued to increase. Dylan also said that Whitefish has a world class trail system.

Lin Akey, Glacier Bank, said he feels the council should be paid. He said from 2005 to current there has been a 20% turnover in the community. Lin said he loves the town, community, the life style and we made it through the recession. We have no shoulder season anymore and we can thank our neighbors up north as they saved us. He also feels we still have problems with employment and growth.

Rhonda Fitzgerald, Heart of Whitefish, said she has a business down town and they are very busy July and August and slower the rest of the year. She said back in 2000 there were businesses up town that were boarded up and now we have a healthy and vibrate city and she feels the Master Plan had a lot to do with that. They now have Farmers Market on Tuesday, the flower pots uptown and the Railway District is getting stronger. They have to remember that retail starts from the center and moves out.

Dave Fern, Whitefish School Board, said there is a 25% increase in students; they have a new high school. They have the No Child Left Behind program. He said they need more affordable housing, the TIF will be coming to an end and he feels that the school and City have a very good relationship.

Kelly Davidson said she is disappointed in the City and the way that they run the Stumptown Ice Rink. She said the city does not promote the ice rink as they want the user groups do to promoting. She said the hockey tournaments bring in a lot of money into the community. She does not feel that the council or Park board listens to the hockey players or parents on the use of the rink.

Jan Metzmaker said she is concerned about BNSF going through town with the different cargo on board. She feels that weeds should be addressed before there are any complaints that way they would stay ahead of the problem.

Joe Page, Interim Fire Chief, said they are a paid department and they are very short of staff as they do not have the volunteers like before. To keep the ISO rating we need to do improvements and have more stations in the outlying areas. He said they have had 2 meetings this summer with the railroad concerning the railcars and evacuation procedures.

Dick Zollner said poverty will see a huge change as we are killing ourselves. We should move the Golf Course outside the city limits.

Chris Hyatt said the government lacks ability to develop a more diverse community. Would an ombudsman spur economic development?

Mike Rossi said he thought wards would be good and he feels there should be public comment before and at the end of the council meetings.

Bill Berg said there is Canadian thistle along the bike paths and they are not getting sprayed or removed. The snow removal on sidewalks is not getting done and the corners downtown need to be done a lot better than they are getting done. City Hall is too big and expensive and it needs to be approved by the citizens and it needs to be redesigned.

Mike Collins, 22 Houston Pt Drive, said he wished the city could enhance their financial analysis economic understanding. He also feels that Whitefish did a great job of hiring Dana Smith as the new Director of Finance as she is a breath of fresh air.

Jesse Walker, owner of Wilson Chiropractor, said he would like to know why there does not seem to be any sandwich sign on the north side of the viaduct except for the Farmers Market. It was explained that it goes with their special event. Rebecca said the council are also looking at doing a corridor study on Wisconsin Avenue and some of that might change.

Jeff Anderson asked what some of the changes they are thinking of. Ken said they have met with the council and department directors and they have thought about paying the council, going back to wards and maybe another way for citizens to approach the council which could be an ombudsman.

Ken Stein said the new City Hall is too large and very expensive and should go before the citizens for a vote.

Matt Baldwin, Whitefish Pilot, said he would like to get as much information as possible about the agenda for council meetings before the Pilot comes out on Wednesdays. He also feels the council should not be making any decisions late at night.

Richard Hildner said he does not feel the council should be paid. He said there are good arguments on both side on the issue of wards but he feels it does divide the city and the council should represent all the citizens. He said the Whitefish council meeting are the best attended in the valley.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.