



City of Whitefish Newsletter

August 2015

Our New City Hall and Parking Structure

Close to 30 Years in the Making

Mayor John M. Muhlfeld

This is an exciting time for the growth of Whitefish. For a small town in Northwest Montana embedded in the most spectacular landscape in the world, we are fortunate to have so many amenities that contribute to the health of our community: world class theater, the WAVE, retail shops, restaurants, art galleries, our remodeled Central School, and a new Whitefish High School. Now we begin the final stage of what will be an important civic building that will serve the citizens of Whitefish for the next 75 to 100 years—our new City Hall.



I applaud the hard work of our city staff and volunteer citizens who have made this latest project come to fruition. The evolution of our new City Hall began nearly 30 years ago as part of our urban renewal plan, and we began setting aside Tax Increments Funds (TIF) for the project in 2003. I want to reiterate that, with the exception of a possible downtown special improvement district to help maintain the parking structure, we will only be using TIF to build this new project. Your property taxes will not be raised to build, operate, or maintain City Hall and the new parking structure.

Effective August 27, City Hall will be temporarily located at 1005 Baker Avenue (the Stampede Square Office Building at the intersection of 10th and Baker just north of the WAVE). Departments and services you can find there include our City Clerk, City Manager, Utility Billing, Administration, City Attorney, Public Works, and Fire Marshal. We will also hold City Council Meetings in this temporary location.

Our New City Hall — continued from front

Our Planning and Building Department, as well as our Parks and Recreation Departments, will remain at their Depot Park location at 510 Railway Street. All telephone numbers and email addresses will remain the same. The city's mailing address also remains as P.O. Box 158. Thank you for your patience and support as we shift our offices.

While upgrading our crumbling City Hall to house the important governmental and public services needed for our unique community, the need for additional parking is never more evident than now at the height of tourist season when we begin to see vehicles overflow into residential areas. Our parking structure will add 212 new spaces that will protect our downtown neighborhoods and make it easier to patronize our important business core. You'll hear more in the coming months about the city's efforts to promote the importance of shopping locally.

As you can see from the rendering shown here, the parking structure has been designed to blend seamlessly into downtown. Our City Hall Steering Committee worked hard to ensure a structure that would follow and reflect on the historic and timeless architecture that defines our downtown business district and use architectural features within our budget.

The project will also deliver 3,000 square feet of new retail on First Street and Baker Avenue that will provide for expanded retail opportunities into the Railway District. Additional public restrooms will also better serve the downtown community and will be located at the northeast corner on First Street.

The next steps in this process are the demolition of the current structure and initial site preparation. The half block of City Hall will be fenced off beginning Tuesday, September 8th, which will also mean that the parking lot behind City Hall will be closed for parking as well. Prior to demolition, there will be a surplus auction on Saturday, September 5th

beginning at 9:00 a.m. in the fire bays and parking lot behind City Hall. Mark your calendars. A flyer on this surplus auction will be sent later.

Baker Avenue and Highway 93 will remain open for traffic flow during construction. As construction commences on September 8th, First Street from the alley behind City Hall to Baker Avenue will likely be closed through the spring of 2016. While it's taken us nearly 30 years to get here, we aim to complete the project by sometime in 2017.

Martel Construction will recycle and re-use up to 90 percent of the existing building in our efforts to meet the intent of design, construction, operation, and



maintenance of an environmentally responsible building. In late September the demolition of City Hall will begin and extend through late October, followed by installation of Rammed Aggregate Piers designed to strengthen the soils for our new foundation. This process will mitigate any potential damage to adjacent historic structures.

The true foundation of Whitefish is built upon the good people here who place a high value on the natural environment surrounding the buildings that define our town. Our new City Hall will be a cornerstone to this city we all love and I look forward to meeting with you in the new chambers a few years from now. Until then, please attend our regular City Council meetings on the first and third Monday of each month at 7:10 pm or email me your thoughts at jmuhlfeld@cityofwhitefish.org.

Resort Tax Funds New Parks & Rec Projects

Parks & Recreation Director, Maria Butts

Parks and Recreation has had a busy summer season, offering a variety of recreation opportunities as well as creating new, inviting features in our parks. As one of our most popular programs, the Stumptown Summer Day Camp hosted a wide range of activities for 5-12 year olds. Campers this summer have been busy learning Soo Bahk Do, Bo Staff handling, hula, art, theater, pickleball, gardening, basketball, dodgeball, and so much more.

Our Tuesday and Thursday field trips introduced campers to many exciting activities throughout the Flathead Valley such as exploring area lakes, hikes in Glacier National Park, the Happy Hippo in Polson, and Big Sky Waterslides in Columbia Falls. New this year was our Friday bike riding session. Children use their own bikes and helmets or borrow a bike from the Parks and Recreation fleet. Many campers broke free of their training wheels this summer and found the freedom of two wheels.

Also this summer, we have been improving Memorial Park. Staff has been working with our "Volunteer to Ski" kids to take down fencing and dilapidated buildings around the Jack Zerr field to make this a more inviting place for parents to teach their children how to catch and throw or use this public space for a fun pick-up game in one of Whitefish's oldest baseball fields.

Along with this park improvement, Memorial Park's old tennis courts are being transformed into four new pickleball courts. We will also be resurfacing the basketball courts and installing a brand new playground. The highlight feature of this park will be a playground zip line that even the biggest of kids will not be able to resist.



This park project is supported by resort tax funds. The Whitefish Parks and Recreation department would like to thank the Whitefish community for buying local and supporting our local parks that make a huge difference to the quality of our lives.

Why Buying Local Sustains our Community

City Councilor, Andy Feury

If you are a long time resident, you remember the condition of our streets in the 1980s-1990s, the days when B98 had an "adopt a pothole" running joke on the morning show. Seriously—cars would get stuck in them. We knew we had a problem. The question was how to pay for all of the repairs needed.

Like similar towns in Montana that see a lot of visitors, 500,000 people annually spend one or more nights in Whitefish. We serve a much bigger population than our tax base can support.

In the Fall of 1995, 56% of us approved a 2% Resort Tax on lodging, restaurants, prepared food, alcoholic beverages and specific "luxury" retail items. (That's right, you don't get charged the tax for your hammer at the local hardware store.) The vote established the tax, the taxable

items, and where the money can be spent: 65% on existing streets and all associated utilities, 5% for bicycle paths and other capital park improvements, 5% for the collecting merchant's administration costs, and 25% for property tax relief.

The Resort Tax Committee was also created, which is the seven member citizen committee that sets the priority list of projects. That list, although long, is getting shorter with \$14,401,337 in street improvements and \$784,814 in park projects completed. And don't forget that \$6,561,127 has been returned to taxpayers in the form of property tax relief. (continued on back page)

Wisconsin Avenue Road Improvement Project to Begin in September

The Montana Department of Transportation will overlay Wisconsin Avenue from the north end of the viaduct to Big Mountain Road beginning Sept. 9. This project is funded entirely from federal Urban Highway Funds and is scheduled to last 25 days. Traffic will be maintained throughout the duration of the construction.

Whitefish City Council has prioritized Wisconsin Avenue for a corridor study that will evaluate existing land uses and opportunities for new land uses that will support existing businesses while protecting the character and quality of adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The City looks forward to improving vehicle and pedestrian circulation while enhancing the character of the corridor for our local businesses and residents. When this study is initiated, the city will create a steering committee consisting of business owners, residents, City staff, and elected officials to help guide the process.

Shopping Local Matters

Continued from previous page

The tax has worked exactly as advertised and as a result was reapproved by voters in 2004 for an additional 20 years with 76% in favor.

Until the opportunity arose for the chance to secure our water supply for future generations with the Haskill Basin conservation easement, I was reluctant to ever support a final 1% increase. But this opportunity was too compelling, and Whitefish voters agreed with 83.6% in favor.

We are fortunate that we have the help from our visitors to fund these vital city needs. But as the tourists leave town this fall, supporting our local merchants will be ever-more important.

Whitefish is a place that is important to so many of us, but it will only remain special by supporting this place you love. The reason you purposely shop in Whitefish is because of the quality of our special town. In return we are able to invest in

the amenities and conservation that defines Whitefish. The merchants are the backbone of the community making this possible.

Paying the resort tax means that everyone who shops here is safeguarding drinking water, outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat, and the spectacular scenic backdrop of Whitefish—not to mention filling those potholes. Supporting our locally-owned businesses is how we pay it forward and it makes shopping in Whitefish truly meaningful.

I am proud of the resort tax and what it means. Let's all help keep it doing the great things it has done and will do for Whitefish.



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Watch for a new look on your next City of Whitefish utility bill. Some of the features include monthly usage graphs, easy-to-read color format, and much more!