

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT

September 2, 2009
09:05–10:00 am
140 West Pine Street

Members Present: Marilyn Marler (chair), Ed Childers, Dave Strohmaier, Bob Jaffe, John Hendrickson, Renee Mitchell, and Jason Wiener, Jon Wilkins

Members Absent: Stacy Rye, Pam Walzer, Dick Haines

Others Present: Donna Gaukler

I. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

A. Approve minutes.

No Minutes to approve.

II. FINAL CONSIDERATION AGENDA ITEMS

III. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

IV. REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

1. **[Discussion Date: 09/02/09]** Discussion on tree pruning ([memo](#)).—Regular Agenda (John Hendrickson) (Referred to committee: 07/06/09)(**INFORMATIONAL ITEM, REMOVE FROM AGENDA**)

John – The referral was to discuss the merits of privatizing the pruning of Missoula's urban forest and whether or not it would be more economical and efficient to hire a private company as opposed to paying three arborists and a park attendant. This is not the only area of the city that I would like to look at for privatizing work.

Donna – the current urban forest budget is \$320,000 which includes the salary for a forester, and two full time arborists and one part-time arborist and one park attendant. If all the urban forestry crew did was prune trees it may be worth researching outsourcing pruning. However this division is also responsible for emergency response to wind and other storm issues as well as planting, stump removal, maintenance of the medians, and snow removal. In an emergency situation it may be more costly and a longer response for a private company. The budget for tree pruning is \$26,000 which puts us at a forty-nine year pruning cycle and the industry standard is 7 years for a healthy forest. It would take \$360,000 annually to adequately prune at that level for the 20,000 right of way trees and an additional 5,000 trees in parks. The block pruning is out-sourced and part of the process preceding the contract is notification of the neighborhood by the urban forestry crew. Having additional work done beyond pruning may increase the cost of a private company. The urban forestry crew is also responsible for mandated snow removal during the winter, tree removals, installation of tree grates and new trees as well as maintenance of the medians. The crew is a resource for planting and other tree related questions by citizens. The division consists of three arborists for safety reasons. The budget for contracts is similar to the entire city's budget for contract work. The department is always looking to find the most economical way to provide services and outsource when feasible.

John – it may be worth looking at retaining a tree service on a per hour basis for emergencies to deal with storm or other emergencies.

Donna – that may be worth some research, and another issue is the limited number of companies who can meet the substantial liability coverage required per MMIA.

Bob - maybe some of the work could be outsourced but we need another process as we shouldn't expect the department to provide the analysis. It would be better to conduct a RFP with specific criteria to see if a private firm would be the better way to go. This sounds like a campaign material which indicates government workers are ineffective and private workers can do the job better and faster.

Marilyn – I did expect a more comprehensive presentation with the urban forester present and providing the amount of time, and budget for their operations.

Ed – the issue at hand is city wide with the idea of outsourcing of regular ongoing functions of organization. The privatization of government services as a money saver and beneficial is a myth, and incorrect. I do agree we should review budgets and we don't want to overspend public money, but don't want public resources to fade away. The trees are not being taken care of and we can't afford to take care of them and that is not acceptable. It is fine to look at privatization of services, but I don't believe the outcome will be any different.

John – maybe other companies would pick up higher insurance if there was a better guarantee of work. For the records I have never once called a city worker ineffective. I was just looking at getting more for our money and I don't know if the answer is to privatize.

Donna – other cities has done efficiencies analysis on functions and Council and administration can discuss that possibility. We don't pre determine how best to spend our money. I agree with John if there was an annual program maybe more companies would get the necessary insurance. We are working on two presentations for Council by the urban forester and to provide a clearer, better picture.

Marilyn – in working with Ben I have found him extremely responsible and responsive and I am optimistic of his abilities and look forward to the presentations.

This is an informational item, no motions.

V. NON-AGENDA ITEMS

VI. HELD AND ONGOING AGENDA ITEMS - PER COMMITTEE CHAIR – Marilyn Marler

- A.** Discuss the ownership, licensing and permitting for Brennan's Wave ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Donna Gaukler) (Referred to committee: 09/08/08)
- B.** Approve construction contracts for Phase 1 of White Pine Park Construction ([memo](#)).—Regular Agenda (Donna Gaukler) (Referred to committee: 02/09/09)

ADJOURNMENT - The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.