

Mayor's Downtown Advisory Commission
March 23, 2010, 1:30-3 pm
MRA Conference Room – 140 W Pine

Attendees: Ginny Merriam, Mark Muir, Susan Hay Cramer, Keenan Whitt, Julie Weaver, Leslie Halligan, Brenda Desmond, Margaret Borg, Nick Roberts, Mayor Engen, Leanna Vreeland, Laurie Johnson, Kim Murray, Rob Scheben, Jason Weiner, Barbara Berans, Dave Strohmaier, Rod Austin, Julie Hilley, Ellie Hill, Erin Fowler, Peggy Seel, Keithi Worthington

Guests: Bob Giordano

1. **Introductions:** Ginny gave a brief background of the former Panhandling Working Group (PWG) and past successes including the Real Change program.
2. **Public Comment:** none
3. **Mission and issues:** Mayor Engen thanked those who served on the PWG. He expressed that he has three thoughts for this group:
 - a. **Perceptions:** We are at the time of year that we are hearing about more behavioral issues downtown. Folks come downtown for business, commerce, and events and we have an obligation to work together to manage perceptions so folks keep coming downtown. This involves traffic, crime, panhandling and more. We need to promote our community assets including: UM, Downtown, and the natural landscape and messaging is important.
 - b. **Crime:** Mayor Engen emphasized that if something is making a person feel concerned, confused or unsafe, they need to call 911. If they call 911 and feel they were not treated appropriately, it is important to let the Mayor's office and Police Department know.
 - c. **Services:** Mayor Engen inquired if the Poverello Center, Food Bank and/or Salvation Army in Missoula get more than their fair share of folks in need of services. Is Missoula the center of human services for the most vulnerable and do we need help managing this population? The Mayor feels we need to deliver measured doses of compassion while recognizing we may have a capacity issue and manage this from a position of strength.
4. **Community policing and Police Department Street Crimes Unit:** As noted in agenda item 3, we need our citizens to be calling 911 when they have an issue to help gauge true demands on our resources. The Missoula Police Department (MPD) would like to be less reactionary in their work and be more aware of the issues on the front end. They also need to be given the opportunity to help the community and not calling 911 does not provide that chance. Dealing with the fear of crime and how we react to it is the biggest challenge MPD faces. Although the budget is tight right now, MPD is trying to focus more on Street Crime Units to allow them to focus more on specific problems and/or areas of town. The School Resource Officers will be on mountain bike patrol again this summer once school is out.
5. **Discussion of potential projects and work plan:** Discussion ensued that the best place to start is data collection to determine where the problem areas are and how the new ordinances are working. This will also help us ascertain if our resources are taxed too much. Another pressing task is promoting the real change program. Ginny Merriam gave a summary of the Real Change program and reported that we will again have a matching grant of \$10,000 a year for the next 3 years. Discussion ensued regarding various other tasks.

From the discussion a list of tasks was created:

- a. Real Change promotion and development
- b. Getting people to call 911 when they have an issue.
- c. Resource data collection – are we getting more than our share of folks and does Missoula have adequate and accessible facilities?

- d. Livable environment effort (restrooms, benches, crime prevention through design).
 - e. Public education about crime, prevention and ordinances - we need to ascertain what the problems are for downtown and does the perception represent the reality of what is happening. We also need to look at the circumstances of Missoula crime (are panhandlers getting blamed for college student crime?) and need more public education on ordinances (what is a crime and what isn't?).
6. **Creation of committees:** After discussion, the group decided on the following committees:
- a. Image and Outreach (this will include Real Change)
 - b. Human Services
 - c. Crime and Prevention
 - d. Livable Environment
7. **Set meeting times:** The committee will meet the First Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3pm. Ellie is offering a tour of the Poverello Center before the April meeting at 12:45pm.