

## MISSOULA REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

### CONDENSED BOARD MEETING MINUTES

October 17, 2024

FINAL

A **Special** meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Missoula Redevelopment Agency was held on Thursday, October 17, 2024 in the Hal Fraser Conference Room, 140 W. Pine St., and via Microsoft Teams at 11:30 a.m. Those in attendance were as follows:

**Board:** Tasha Jones, Melanie Brock, Jack Lawson, Ruth Reineking, Mike Nugent - City Council Ex-Officio Board Member

**Staff:** Ellen Buchanan, Annie Gorski, Annette Marchesseault, Michael Hicks, Jilayne Dunn, Lesley Pugh

**Public:** Yelena Onnen; Audrey Handelman; Martin Kidston, Missoula Current; MCAT

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

11:30 a.m.

Jones chaired the meeting.

#### **INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no public comments or announcements.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

Jones announced the second Action Item on the Agenda regarding the MRA Audit Contract will be deferred to the upcoming Board Meeting on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

#### **[Transform Brooks – Connect Midtown \(URD III / Wards 3, 4 & 5\) – TIF Funding Request for Scope Amendment \(Marchesseault\)](#)**

Marchesseault said the last time staff came to the Board for the Transform Brooks – Connect Midtown project was for a request of funding to cover travel costs for a group to go on a field trip to peer communities with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems. One thing they learned on that field trip is that every BRT system is different. She said it was a really informative field trip and included business and property owners from Midtown, members of the Missoula Midtown Association (MMA), folks from the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and Mountain Line, elected officials and City staff.

Marchesseault said through the process the community has been in since 2014, center-running BRT was determined as a preferred concept to move forward. Following the field trip and discussions, a number of stakeholders, business and property owners brought forward a desire to look at a side-running BRT configuration. Marchesseault said a number of things also occurred right around the time of the field trip that had some influence on the project. Corey Aldridge, General Manager of Mountain Line, announced he was taking another job, and the Director of MDT announced he was resigning, resulting in a change in leadership at two of MRA's significant partners.

Marchesseault said over the summer the project team has been working with the consultants, HDR, and processing how to navigate this. They asked HDR to put together a scope amendment to look at a side-running configuration developed to the same level they currently have the center-running configuration. They also want HDR to compare the two configurations equitably and look at property impacts, permeability across Brooks Street, benefits for economic development and operations. They need to know what the side-running does for traffic impacts because the buses will be running in the side lanes with traffic and the stops would be on the back side of the curb.

There is currently a \$35,000 contingency in the existing project budget. HDR's cost to look at side-running BRT is right around \$65,000 and staff feels that is a fair fee. Staff is proposing to use the \$35,000 contingency and then split the difference between MRA and Mountain Line which would be \$16,723.32 a piece. Marchesseault said staff is requesting the MRA Board approve \$30,000 and the balance of \$13,276.68 would go back into contingency, pending the Mountain Line board approving \$16,723.32.

Brock asked if the current TIF investment of \$50,000 noted in Marchesseault's memo was a match for the federal grant. Marchesseault said yes and it is specific to this project. She also put together numbers of what MRA has spent in total toward transit-oriented development (TOD) and it is around \$250,000 dating back to 2014. Brock asked if the \$11,000 from the field trip would bring the number to \$61,000. Marchesseault said yes. Buchanan said the Federal Transit Agency (FTA), MDT and Mountain Line also contributed to the field trip. Nugent said he went on the field trip and it was very educational. He spoke in favor of doing a side-running BRT study because of seeing how the different communities operate. He said he had his eyes opened on different ways to run a BRT system and ways to make it work in Missoula, which doesn't have to be the exact same as somewhere else. He said this is a good idea for a better end product. Going in with a basic understanding and seeing it, it is clear to him both options need to be looked at. Reineking concurred and said she appreciates Nugent's perspective and as a representative from that district. Reineking asked if there are objections to the center-running or advantages people already see for side-running. She asked what the general feeling is. Nugent said he doesn't think there are objections because it isn't far enough along to have anybody have a really strong opinion on it. He said there are things that both alternatives would do to acquire public right-of-way (ROW) and things like that. It became more clear to him that they should study more than one option for the road as a whole to see what's best. He doesn't think there are objections, but more questions about if and how it will dip into the ROW and what that will look like, if Brooks Street will maintain two-way or if traffic patterns will change, etc. Nugent said the field trip really opened eyes to there being more than one way to do it.

Reineking asked what the criteria/deciding factor will be to pick one over the other and who will decide that. Marchesseault said HDR has helped the project team go through some exercises to determine important criteria. Those include Brooks Street permeability, economic development, MDT comfort with the proposal, operational efficiency and equity. The team have gone through some exercises that have helped them start to do matrices. There are merits in both directions. They are going to ask HDR to take a deeper dive and come back with refined matrices. The process will be that as HDR comes back with information, their recommendation is that the sponsor team (MRA, Mountain Line, City of Missoula) should have an attitude toward which direction they think might have more merit, and then take that information to the project team/steering committee to see what they think. From there it will be taken to the advisory committees which reaches out into that equity piece of those who ride the bus, people with disabilities, etc. Eventually it will be taken to the public. Marchesseault said they've never done this so it is being taken one step at a time with direction from the consultants. Reineking asked if the public will be shown both options or the preferred option. Marchesseault said they will be shown the process and if there is a preferred option it will show what that is, but will not say definitively that this is what it is. Buchanan said there are some really pragmatic things that will come out of this. One is operational impacts including ROW access. The perception from the field trip is that there will be a lot less ROW acquisition required with side-running. That may or may not be true because they still have to deal with the pedestrian realm on Brooks Street. Also, the systems they saw on the field trip that were side-running and worked well were those that had special accommodations for the buses that didn't exist for the cars. Those accommodations could include preference given through a signal, bullet lanes, etc. The question is if those are things that MDT will be comfortable with. Buchanan said a big question for her is if they can do side-running and still get the permeability they think they can get with center-running, and will side-running give the same sense of permanent investment that center-running can. She said these are all things that need to be evaluated.

Reineking asked if there would be any violation to the terms of the federal grant to study side-running. Marchesseault said the grant was written to study center-running. However, they have guidance that this is not uncommon for this to happen. She said they are not asking the FTA for more money or to reallocate the grant funding for something radically different. Marchesseault noted one of the other criteria the consultants are being asked to look at as they compare the two systems is competitiveness for funding from the FTA. She said they have to be very practical and this will actually help their case when they do submit for funding because they will have information in hand that says they looked at both systems and here are the reasons why one is being chosen over the other.

Lawson asked if the project team is confident they have the scope right now since the scope is growing and more money is being put into it to answer questions. Marchesseault said they spent the summer identifying what they think the important criteria are if they are going to study two systems. She and Buchanan feel that economic development in Midtown and permeability across Brooks Street need to be a significant part of the consideration because that is what started this process from the beginning. Some BRT systems they looked at on the field trip were strictly to move people from point A to point B. That is not what Missoula is looking to do, they are looking at TOD as well as BRT. Buchanan said a big difference is that those transit systems were independent of the cities and did not include an economic development mission. Other areas of criteria include permanence, property impacts, traffic

operations and Mountain Line operations. Buchanan said staff is confident the scope is right for the comparison of the two systems. If, for instance, it turns out that side-running is the preferred thing to do, staff will be back asking for additional funding for public outreach because they have been talking for years about center-running and already have drawings, renderings and people have seen it. Staff may be back for a request for more for public outreach anyway.

Reineking asked when the Mountain Line board is meeting. Marchesseault said their regular board meeting is October 24<sup>th</sup>. Reineking asked what the feeling is about them approving this. Marchesseault said their staff have given MRA staff a positive indication. Buchanan said Mountain Line's new Director, Jordan Hess, is very much in support of this.

Brock said this spring was when the plan was supposed to be unveiled. She asked if the funding that was allocated for outreach last spring is being eaten up by the scope change. Buchanan said the amount of public outreach is the one aspect of any project like this that is hardest to predict on the front end. This project has spanned many years and that is why she responded to Lawson's question saying staff may be back for more funding.

Marchesseault said the base project, before they went on the field trip and started to look at an alternative, had a schedule that was to present the technical concepts of center-running right after they got back from the field trip and then take it through the steering and advisory committees and do public outreach, with approval and acceptance this fall. Things slowed down and required more examination of everything this summer because of the interest in side-running, and also the changes in leadership at MDT and Mountain Line. HDR estimates the scope amendment will take about three months. Once that is done, the project team will pick back up with the existing scope and determine a preferred alternative and take it through the process. The original scope did include a second public meeting as a virtual public meeting. Rather than asking HDR for a big scope amendment right now, they want to take it in bite size pieces and just look at the side-running alternative. When everyone is in agreement of the preferred alternative, then there will be an evaluation of whether or not additional scope is needed for public engagement and MDT engagement. Marchesseault said MDT is a significant partner and staff has not been examining side-running with them. They have been at the table for center-running.

Reineking said she imagines MMA, who have been in these conversations for years, would be supportive of having alternatives to look at. Marchesseault said some of the business and property owners who were on the field trip and have expressed interest in examining side-running are also members of the MMA and sit on the advocacy and implementation committees. She said that isn't association-wide, but is representative of membership. Brock concurred that was a fair assessment. She said she has heard an eagerness to see what are going to be the final options and an eagerness to get back out to the public. At the same time, a collective applaud that every possible option is being looked at for Missoula today and into the future. She said a Mountain Line employee said at a recent meeting that the "do nothing" on this is Brooks fails. How they're going to move the extra 25,000-40,000 people they are anticipating coming to this valley down the highway that runs through it and then make it safe for kids and residents to cross Brooks, it doesn't happen without this exercise. Brock said as a Southsider, MMA staffer, MRA Board member and a Missoulian of 20+ years, she sees the importance of meticulous attention being given to the options on

the table because it is going to have a huge impact on what happens next. She said they all care so much about Brooks Street and it comes up in so many conversations.

Martin Kidston, Missoula Current, asked if the new concept would place buses on the side lanes and when MRA expects to have the new concept in hand. Marchesseault said yes, the alternative concept would essentially keep current lanes where they are, except at intersections, and buses would share those outside lanes with vehicles. Staff expects the concept to be ready in approximately three months. Kidston asked if traffic impacts will be considered in the study. Buchanan said yes. Marchesseault added they don't have the budget to do fine grained traffic analysis, but traffic impacts will be considered.

**REINEKING: I MOVE THE MRA BOARD APPROVE THE STAFF REQUEST FOR \$30,000 IN TIF FUNDS, WITH \$16,723.32 BEING ALLOCATED TO PARTIALLY FUND AN AMENDMENT TO THE TRANSFORM BROOKS – CONNECT MIDTOWN CONTRACT WITH HDR, DIRECTING THE CONSULTANT TEAM TO ANALYZE A SIDE-RUNNING BRT CONFIGURATION ON BROOKS STREET AND EQUITABLY COMPARE IT WITH THE CENTER-RUNNING BRT CONFIGURATION UNDER CONSIDERATION, AND THE REMAINING \$13,276.68 BEING ALLOCATED AS PROJECT CONTINGENCY, CONTINGENT ON THE MOUNTAIN LINE BOARD ALSO APPROVING \$30,000 FOR THE SAME PURPOSE. SHOULD THE MOUNTAIN LINE BOARD APPROVE ONLY \$16,723.32 TO PARTIALLY FUND THE SCOPE AMENDMENT, STAFF RECOMMENDS THAT THE MRA ALSO ONLY APPROVE THE SAME AMOUNT FOR THAT PURPOSE.**

Lawson seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.

**Motion passed unanimously (4 ayes, 0 nays).**

**MRA Audit Contract (Fiscal Years 2025 – 2027) – Request for Approval (Dunn)**

This item is postponed to the October 31, 2024 Regular Board Meeting.

**NON-ACTION ITEMS**

**STAFF REPORTS**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**OTHER ITEMS**

**ADJOURNMENT**

Adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lesley Pugh