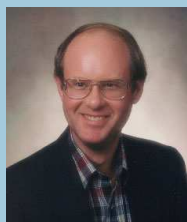


Leader^{less}

All the news the Tribune finds unfit for print

Status of great falls:

- Neighborhood Pools Closing
- Schools closing
- City golf courses for sale
- Broadwater Bay turned into parking lot for pizza joint.
- Holiday Village struggling, Hi-line drives past GF to shop
- L & C Bicentennial losses over \$600K and City still counting. Mayor calls it a deal.
- Kidnapper arrested while staying at city managers home
- City proposes taking on over \$10,000 of debt for every man, woman & child to buy power generation and distribution systems



!!NEWS FLASH!!
Tribune endorses Gray
It hasn't happened yet but
the Trib's love-fest rela-
tionship with city hall
makes it a lock.

Live right here?

The definition of insanity is continuing to repeat the same actions and each time expecting different results. This seems like a fitting description of Great Falls city elections.

Although many of us complain about the City Commission's actions, seldom do we follow with action. "They don't listen so why attend" or "the vote is decided before the meeting" are common complaints about City Commission meetings. However, there is one place they will hear your complaints: the voting booth.

Great Falls' economy continues to lag behind that of other major cities in Montana. No, it's not the casinos or pawn shops - those are legal everywhere in the state. It's not our zoning - look at Kalispell's strange growth patterns or Bozeman's strict

rules. It's not our lack of a major university, we have some great local schools that we often fail to recognize.

It is leadership. Recently one of our City Commissioners said he would be glad when we quit focusing on "ag issues" and started looking in other directions. We regularly watch as the City Commission approves projects that do not fit the needs of our community. We **are** an agricultural community. We are a military community. We are a health care center for a large region of our state. We should be a retail center for the eastern half of the state yet even our own citizens travel to Billings to shop.. We have a large number of highly skilled, hard working blue collar workers. These are the people that make our community great. And yes, many of

them like to tinker with their cars on the weekends.

Our City Commission built a parking garage without learning the needs of those that were intended to use it. They built a water park where most of us cannot afford to regularly send our children and are closing the pools we *can* afford. They pledged our tax dollars to a wonderful Lewis & Clark event and then priced it out of reach of many of our citizens. (\$50 for ice cream for a family of 5)

They are gifted at spending our tax dollars as though we are a wealthy community. And on that note, how much has been spent studying the possibility of public take-over of our power? Yes, this is their latest "great idea".

King of Great Falls?

Not too long ago, Mayor Gray's very nice wife was involved in an automobile accident. Two other vehicles were involved, one of which happened to be a modified, 'low-rider' type vehicle.

After the accident, the low-rider burst into flames

and, thankfully, no one was seriously injured. The accident was not, repeat, **was not** the fault of the low-rider. Over a week after the accident and after many public statements by Gray condemning vehicle modification, the city attorney (at

somebody's urging) looked over the police report. The low-rider driver was cited with operating a motor vehicle in an unsafe condition. A misdemeanor carrying a penalty of \$500 and up to 6 months in jail.

See KING (Continued on page 4)



Q: What did we get for \$535,072?

A: Empty seats.

\$535,072

What's that? Yup, the amount of your money the City of Great Falls still owes on the Lewis and Clark, Explore! The Big Sky (EBS). The amount above doesn't include city employee salaries or expenses while supporting EBS. The event ended in early July and the city still hasn't released these numbers, but have estimated them at over \$100,000. They must be waiting until after the election. If you think the \$100,000 estimate will be accurate, remember how far off the crowd

size estimates were.

When asked about the huge loss by the Tribune Mayor Gray was quoted saying "the three days of Indian cultural events were well worth a half a million dollars alone" he also said "I saw bridges grow across gaps that have been too wide and too deep for too long. How do you measure the value of that?". Mr. Gray might have very well been right if attendance hadn't been so abysmal. Empty tour buses and event seats do little to further the cause for Na-

tive Americans. It was, however, a crafty political move to change the conversation from city mismanagement of tax dollars to one of racial healing. I think most Native American leaders would agree that a smaller event packed full would have been just as valuable.

Whatever you think about the Lewis and Clark event, it was a financial failure. And you deserve a lot more explanation than some arrogant platitudes.

"So Mayor Gray arranged a deal where McKenzie River Pizza would get a parking lot at terms better than free."



La Quinta Inn
Mayor Gray's hotel directly south of McKenzie River Pizza

Mayor profits selling city parking lot for free

On November 24 the editorial staff of the Tribune stated that the mayor was given a "bum rap" for his involvement in a land deal with McKenzie River Pizza. The deal involved Mayor Gray and associates selling land for the new McKenzie River Pizza restaurant. The only problem was that the lot was not large enough for a restaurant and a parking lot. So Mayor Gray arranged a deal where McKenzie River Pizza would get a parking lot at terms better than free. For a \$1 a year lease they get a parking lot carved out of Broadwater Bay park land. The new parking lot is maintained by the city without McKenzie River Pizza having to pay expenses like property taxes, snow removal, liability insurance, asphalt maintenance or landscaping upkeep.

I think it is highly proper for citizens to question city ventures that directly profit our highest officials or their close business partners. It is true that the Mayor recused himself and did not vote, but he did lead the public discussion between citizens and city staff. During that discussion Steve Shuel owner of McKenzie River Pizza was asked if not getting the city parking lot lease was a deal breaker and he replied it was. So what did the mayor have at stake? First, the Mayor's land would not sell at the price McKenzie River Pizza was willing to pay if the city subsidized parking was not included. Second, the Mayor's partner Brad Talcott, co-owner of the land, would have lost out on the contract to build the new building.

Construction began the day after the vote. All involved were so confi-

dant of the outcome, even before the public hearing and commission voting, that crews and equipment were already scheduled, permits already approved and final architectural plans drafted.

Shuel at the commission meeting said the deal was worth over \$1,000,000. Most of this money clearly went for land and construction costs. This means that the mayor and his close business associates probably reaped close to \$1,000,000 due to the city leasing city park land for \$1 a year to McKenzie River Pizza. Why shouldn't citizens be skeptical? Better yet why wouldn't the Tribune do a better job at reporting the level of involvement and possible motivating factors in this unusual public-private partnership? Could it be because

See PIZZA (Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2) PIZZA

a member of the Tribune's editorial staff (Linda Caricaburu) is married to the mayor's partner (Brad Talcott), who owns the construction company that had much to gain from this venture?

This deal may not have raised as much suspicion if the same terms

had been offered to local business people, and the parking lot lease sold to the highest bidder. But this might have resulted in a business not as complimentary to the La Quinta Inn which is next door to McKenzie River Pizza. Why is this important? Because Mayor Gray and his partners own the La Quinta Inn and the La

Quinta Inn brags on it's web site about it's close proximity to McKenzie River Pizza.

Maybe Mayor Gray is virtuous in these dealings, but the Tribune's spin on this story and the lack of competitive bidding makes one wonder what is really going on.

“This deal may not have raised as much suspicion if the same terms had been offered to local business people”

Kyrgyzstan on my mind

This is such an odd tale that one hardly knows where to begin. Back in 1999 the city was notified by the International City/County Management Association of its selection to participate in the ICMA International Resource Cities Program. The match city was Naryn, Kyrgyzstan about 6,000 miles away. The City would be obligated to cover the salaries of its employees while they participate in short term overseas assignments. The City was only be expected to provide technical assistance to Naryn.

The city commission

voted unanimously to participate in the program. At this point it seemed like just a bureaucratic boondoggle that would provide some lucky city staff with free trips to Asia with the city's only costs being their salary. But a search of the city's web site for references to this project revealed the following.

In 1999 the city bought a new garbage truck. The city commission at the time (Gray, Rosenbaum and Beecher) decided to give the old garbage truck to Naryn. They then tasked city staff to figure out how to get it there. City staff

worked on it for a year before they came to the conclusion that transporting a used garbage truck over two continents and one ocean is well, insane. The truck was then put up for auction and netted \$15,868. In 2004 this money was removed from the city sanitation account and sent to Naryn. The gift amounted to 6% of the 2004 sanitation budget. In 2005 the commissioners raised collection fees 3% to cover costs. No information was available on how this affected collection rates in Naryn.



GF foreign Aid?
Commissioners tried to ship a city Garbage Truck to Kyrgyzstan as a gift. When they were told it wasn't feasible they sent cash to buy one instead. It's easy to be generous with your money.

Montana Public Power

So, City Manager Lawton and Mayor Gray want to buy Northwestern Energy's transmission assets for 2 **BILLION** dollars. Great idea, huh?

After all, stop and think about the string of financial successes we've seen from the City of Great Falls. Um, let's see. We have a water park that is bleeding money. Our golf courses are

bleeding money. Our local pools are going to be closed because they are, yup, you guessed it, bleeding money. Oh wait, we almost forgot the Explore! The Big Sky. It lost over half a million dollars!

Recently Mr. Lawton took a practice step into being a public utility by creating a new Fox Farm area lighting district. How did it go? Bad. The city

solicited bids to put in their own street lights. After all the costs were tallied homes in the new district would pay 20% more than what Northwestern Energy would have charged. The city reported that their engineer's cost estimates for installation were 50% lower than the actual costs. Residents and developers in the new lighting district are not happy

See POWER (Continued on page 4)

“stop and think about the string of financial successes we've seen from the City of Great Falls”



**The Great Falls
Leaderless**

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Hello Great Falls

Why did we put out this newsletter? The motivation behind this publication is a love of Great Falls. Many of us hear stories every day about how other large cities in Montana are prospering while Great Falls is turning into a retirement community (hospitals expanding and schools closing). We have excellent schools. Our children receive a top-notch education, which makes them highly desirable to out of state employers, which is where our children must move to find a good job. We don't believe it has to be this way. Great Falls needs new direction and this requires new leaders who will use city government to better Great Falls not further their own agenda. We think the local media does little to check the power of local government. Can you remember the last time the local paper was critical of city government?

Montana Public Power

(Continued from page 3) **POWER**

paying extra just so the city can pretend to be a power utility. Are you now ready to roll the dice for \$2 Billion?

Another troubling detail of the buyout is that it will be 100% financed. If Northwestern is having trouble paying bills now, with less than 2 Billion of debt, how will the city cover the payments on the additional money they will need to borrow? This could be made even worse if lenders feel this new utility venture is risky, and charge a higher interest to make up for the additional risk. This means one of the following will happen: rates will go up, services will go down or

another bankruptcy.

Risk and competence aside it's hard to see the benefit in owning Northwestern Energy. Northwestern is only a distribution company. That means "Electric wires and gas pipe only". Their rates are fully regulated by the state of Montana. The same as Montana Power was. Northwestern is not allowed by the state to mark up the price it pays for power. It just passes the cost on. The only significant opportunity to save us ratepayers money is to find a cheaper source of power. We've all heard horror stories about government procurement, so why would we expect our city government to do better?

Buying Northwestern Energy to lower electric costs is like buying the oil refinery here in town to lower the price of gas. Northwestern has no more control over what PPL charges for electricity than the oil refinery has over the price of a barrel of Canadian crude.

And if this power line buyout fails, will City Manager Lawton step up to the plate with \$2 Billion? Nope. He'll be long gone by then, and the "ratepayers" will be holding the bag. Well that's not so bad, we don't even know the ratepayers. Who are they, anyway?

Anyone have a mirror?

(Continued from page 1) **KING**

Mayor Gray's response? He didn't improve turn lanes on 10th Ave. He didn't look into the driving record of the driver who caused the accident. He did go to the legislature and seek legis-

lation outlawing vehicle modifications!

Never mind that fixing up your hot-rod is a time-honored, respectable hobby of thousands of local residents. Never mind that this hobby contributes untold thousands

of dollars to our local economy. Never mind that cool cars are, well, cool.

Nope, King Gray almost had a negative experience with a hot-rod.

Be Gone with Them!



Refinery next?

Buying Northwestern Energy to save money on electricity is like buying the Montana Refinery to save money on a tank of gasoline.

