

**City of Missoula, Montana**  
**Item to be Referred to City Council Committee**

**Committee:** Conservation Committee

**Agenda Item:** Johnson Street Park and Bitterroot Trail Connection

**Date:** November 16, 2016

**Sponsor:** Elizabeth Erickson, Open Space Acquisitions Attorney

**Prepared by:** Elizabeth Erickson, Open Space Acquisitions Attorney

**Wards affected:** Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

---

**Action Required:**

Set a public hearing for December 12, 2016 during the regularly scheduled City Council meeting for adoption of a Resolution that authorizes the expenditure of up to \$390,000, or the remaining balance in the 1995 Open Space Bond, to help acquire approximately 4.5 acres of the 12 acres of land from Montana Rail Link (MRL), located at the corner of Johnson Street and North and South Avenues and along the Bitterroot Branch railroad line. The property contains approximately 4.5 acres that will be developed as a public neighborhood park. The property will also provide the remaining connection in the Bitterroot Trail from Missoula to Hamilton.

**Recommended Motion:**

The committee recommends that City Council set a public hearing for December 12, 2016 to adopt a resolution to expend up to \$390,000, or the remaining funds in the 1995 Open Space Bond, to support the City's acquisition approximately 4.5 acres of 12 acres at Johnson Street to develop a neighborhood park and connect the Bitterroot Trail.

**Timeline:**

Referral to committee:	November 10, 2016
Committee discussion:	November 16, 2016
Council acts to set hearing:	November 21, 2016
Public hearing:	December 12, 2016

**Background:**

The Franklin to Fort neighborhood and that portion of the Southgate Triangle neighborhood west of Brooks Street have been steadily growing in population over recent decades. Population growth and other development in this area has proceeded without the addition of sufficient park, trail and open space land to meet the recommended level of service per capita of parkland recommended in the 2004 Master Parks and Recreation Plan. This project would add an approximately 4.5 acre neighborhood park in the Franklin to Fort neighborhood and that portion of the Southgate Triangle neighborhood west of Brooks Street and provide the missing connection in the Bitterroot Trail from downtown Missoula to Hamilton.

Missoula was awarded a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to connect the Missoula to Lolo portion of the Bitterroot trail, a 50 mile trail that extends from Missoula to Hamilton. The Missoula to Lolo connection was completed in 2016, creating a world class bicycle/pedestrian facility that attracts bicycle tourists and sees frequent use by local residents. However, there remains one four-block gap in the trail between downtown Missoula and Hamilton. The Johnson Street property now provides the opportunity to connect the remaining portion of this trail. With the completion of the bicycle/pedestrian bridge across South Reserve Street, the connection becomes even more essential. Missoula's longer term Active Transportation plans highlight the Bitterroot Trail as a primary commuter route and also depict additional connections extending the Milwaukee Railroad Trail to the east and west, and potentially other trail connections to the north extending into the Blackfoot Valley, the Jocko Valley and beyond.

The City has worked with Montana Rail Link for a number of years to negotiate the details of a bargain sale purchase of the Johnson Street property. The property consists of 12 acres bounded by Johnson Street on the west, the Bitterroot Branch Line on the east, North Avenue to the north and South Avenue to the south. The property contains a number of commercial buildings on the northern portion of the property and undeveloped land on the southern end. The purchase price is \$2,000,000, which is considerably below market value for land in the urban core of Missoula. The property is located in Urban Renewal District III. The funding sources for the remaining portion of the \$2,000,000 purchase price and the construction of the trail connection is TIF revenue bond. The difference between fair market value and the purchase price will constitute a generous donation from MRL to the City of Missoula.

In contrast to the 2006 Open Space Bond, the 1995 Open Space Bond can be used to acquire land for developed park land. The funds that remain in the 1995 Open Space Bond have been reserved all these years for this very such opportunity – to acquire land for a neighborhood park in the Franklin to Fort Neighborhood.

The 2006 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan Update identifies the importance of neighborhood parks to the overall open space and parks system and states a vision of securing more neighborhood park land. Moreover, the 2004 *Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area* (“Master Park Plan”) states as a specific goal acquiring and developing additional lands as adequately sized neighborhood parks in underserved neighborhoods. The Master Parks Plan also identifies goals for the amount of parkland in relation to population and recommends 2.5 acres of neighborhood park land for every 1000 residents. Based on 2006 population estimates, the Franklin to Fort Neighborhood is disproportionately deficient in acres of parkland, relative to other areas of Missoula. This project would add approximately 4.5 acres of parkland in that area.

On November 10, 2016, the Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) voted unanimously to recommend that City Council expend up to \$390,000, the remaining portion of the 1995 Open Space Bond, toward the purchase of the approximate 4.5 acres of future park land and trail as part of the Johnson Street acquisition.

**Financial Implications:**

The Johnson Street park and trail acquisition proposes to use the remaining portion of the 1995 Open Space Bond, which is \$389,533.99 toward the purchase of the property for the neighborhood park and trail connection. The balance of the \$2,000,000 purchase price and design and construction of the trail would be covered using URD III TIF Revenue Bonds.

**Attachments:**

Exhibit A – Resolution

Exhibit B – Map