

December 2, 2019

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator
City of Billings
P.O. Box 1178
Billings, MT 59101

Dear Chris,

There is an item coming before City Council that proposes to vacate a very small piece of South 26th Street to Yellowstone Health Partnership (YHP). This section is one lot wide. The remainder of the block of South 26th Street between 1st Avenue South and 2nd Avenue South has already been vacated to YHP. With the vacation of this small space we will be able to redesign the traffic flow through our campus to enhance the safety of drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians working, visiting, and seeking services at RiverStone Health.

The property in question comprises 50 lineal feet of the South 26th Street right-of-way fronting Lots 23 & 24, Block 142 and Lots 1 & 2, Block 141 of the Billings Original Townsite. The right-of-way is 80 feet wide, so the area being petitioned is 4,000 square feet.

YHP is a 501(c)(3) whose sole sponsoring member is RiverStone Health. YHP's primary role is to hold property and debt for RiverStone Health, a public entity. YHP delivers no services other than those provided directly to RiverStone Health.

The reason the area under consideration now was not previously vacated was that the lot was privately owned until August 31, 2017 when Yellowstone Health Partnership purchased it on behalf of RiverStone Health. With this purchase, YHP now holds title to the entire area circumscribed by 1st Avenue South, South 25th Street, 2nd Avenue South, and South 27th Street as well as most of the block circumscribed by South 27th Street, 2nd Avenue South, South 26th Street, and 3rd Avenue South.

We respectfully ask the City Council consider conveying this small piece of property to YHP without cost. There are three (3) primary reasons we make this request:

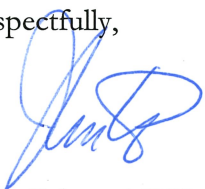
1. RiverStone Health is a public entity, organized in 1998 as a multi-jurisdictional service district for health services and health department functions under an interlocal agreement. The sponsoring local governments (i.e., signatories to the interlocal agreement) for the multi-jurisdictional service district are the City of Billings, the City of Laurel, and Yellowstone County. The City of Billings has a governance interest in RiverStone Health, appointing two members to the Board of Health that serves as our overall governing body. Although some mistakenly think that RiverStone Health is a private non-profit organization, it is in fact governmental, legally named Yellowstone City-County Health Department and serving as the local public health agency for Yellowstone County.

2. Although YHP is a non-profit, it provides no services other than for RiverStone Health. The multi-jurisdictional service district lacks statutory authority to hold debt, although as a completely controlled 501(c)(3) YHP can do so for the public entity. The fact that Yellowstone Health Partnership can own real property and hold debt on behalf of the multi-jurisdictional service district has been key to the growth and development of RiverStone Health and its South Billings campus.
3. Over the last ten years, RiverStone Health has made significant improvements to its South Billings campus. We have built two new structures, remodeled the original building on the campus, enhanced greenspaces and the overall appearance of the campus, and removed several structures that were no longer safely habitable. In spring 2020 we will restore the community garden that used to serve our community until the new community health center facility was built and the area in which the former community garden was located was needed for parking. With the recent purchase of the property described above and the razing of the unsafe structure, we now have space not only for the community garden, but also for a community orchard that will serve the residents of South Billings who live in a designated “food desert” due to the absence of access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Further, because the razed structure played an important role in the development of South Billings, when we create the community garden and orchard we will honor the history of the structure and its impact on our neighborhood.

As many are aware, RiverStone Health paid the City of Billings for the most recent property we obtained from it. The current request is for a very small piece of property that best serves the City, our organization, and the people we serve by being vacated to support the work of RiverStone Health. Given our long history of community and campus improvement, our public status, and our relationship with the City of Billings as a sponsor of the multi-jurisdictional service district, we respectfully ask that the small space described above be vacated to Yellowstone Health Partnership at no cost.

I am happy to meet with you or Council as you deem most appropriate to further discuss this request.

Respectfully,



John Felton, MPH, MBA, FACHE
President & CEO / Health Officer