

City Council Work Session

5:30 PM

Hybrid, Billings Public Library Community Center and Zoom

May 19, 2021

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) ✓ Cole, ✓ Shaw, ✓ Yakawich, ✓ Neese,
 ✓ Ewalt, ✓ Joy, ✓ Choriki, ✓ Purinton, ✓ Ronning, ✓ Boyett, ✓ Brown

CM excused: ALL COUNCILMEMBERS PRESENT

ADJOURN TIME: 10:04 PM

Agenda

TOPIC #1	FY2022 Departmental Budget Presentations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aviation / Transit • Public Works • Parking • Urban Renewal Funds • Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) • Downtown Billings Improvement District (BID)
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- Mayor Cole added an item for discussion to the Agenda. Noted as #2 below.
- **Kevin Ploehn, Aviation and Transit Director:** gave a PowerPoint presentation of Airport accomplishments, challenges, enplanement numbers, operating revenues, expenses, revenue funding, COVID relief funds, terminal project funding, Transit achievements, challenges, total ridership, operating budget, FY22 operating budget, expenditures, COVID relief funds, departmental full time employee request.
- **Purinton:** what do you do with extra money? Ploehn: share with Airport and MET Transit. CARES Act funding will be used at terminal. Finance department reinvests for the City.
- **Ewalt:** why are people driving to Bozeman for cheaper flights? Ploehn: Billings now has Frontier to remain more competitive. Bozeman has too much capacity. In discussion with airlines for more routes.
- **Neese:** marketing position to entice airlines for more direct flights? Ploehn: Visit Billings creates increase, but airlines like using a hub system.
- **Ronning:** Southwest airlines and more direct flights? Ploehn: airlines looking for revenue, looking at Atlanta service, Southwest unknown.
- **Kukulski:** no local property taxes go towards airport. Needs to compete with best airports, marketing position will help.
- **Debi Meling, Public Works Director and Jennifer Duray, Deputy Public Works Director:** gave a PowerPoint presentation about Public Works, Core Services provided, annual accomplishments, Project and Row Management,

Street Maintenance, Traffic management, Stormwater system management, Solid Waste, safe drinking water, Wastewater management. Overview of 2021 projects, budget highlights, expenses, revenues, changes in FY22 expenses, proposed fees, fee comparisons.

- Discussion of increase in construction costs. Meling: Alternative delivery method helps keep costs consistent.
- **Joy:** collections outside City done by private companies? Duray: correct. 9.9% increase to County.
- **Joy:** does private companies pass 9.9% increase on to customers? Duray: not certain but would assume so.
- **Neese:** bumping water rate tier up? Duray: currently working on model with new rates.
- **Tracy Scott, Parking Manager:** gave a PowerPoint presentation overview of the Parking Division services and functions, staffing, revenues from parking garages, meters, violations, leases, expenses, challenges and successes.
- **Ronning:** congratulate Parking Division on partnering with downtown restaurants during COVID.
- **Neese:** when will division be fully self supporting? Scott: hope downtown will recover soon, many businesses have dropped monthly parking due to employees working from home. Too soon to tell what future will bring.
- **Kukulski:** profitable Parking system very difficult. Will need to be thriving downtown. Increased revenue due to investment in gate systems and extended hours. Looking at same technology at Empire garage. Parking garage attached to Wells Fargo needs facelift.
- **Ewalt:** parking garage security issues? Scott: security checks regularly, break ins occasionally, porta potties not being used as much as before.
- **Purinton:** kilowatts needed for charging stations fees working for City? Scott: set amount at \$2.50, breaking even currently with electricity. Will look into rates and usage.
- **Andy Zoeller, Finance Director:** PowerPoint presentation reviewing: Urban Renewal Funds - Downtown Revolving Loan Fund, Downtown Tax Increment, East and South Billings Tax Increment District.
- **Mayor:** staff comfortable with overall numbers? Zoeller: debt service, capital projects come through CIP, development incentive programs already approved by Council and just finishing up this year.
- **Neese:** operating agreements includes? Zoeller: defer to districts, more than just salaries.
- **Neese:** why is Downtown District higher than others? Mehmet Casey, Downtown Billings Alliance: operating costs, salaries, property management of Yesteryears building, website, marketing materials, accounting, attorney services. Number has not changed for past 3 years.
- **Neese:** does staff question why downtown district costs is higher than others? Zoeller: uncertain, but will get back with Council. Downtown does a lot more services, have more staff.
- **Shaw:** would like to see how we compare with other cities next year.

- **Ronning:** substantial salaries being paid in TIF Districts. Would like staff to revisit the MOU and each boards vision for districts presented to Council. Reemphasis on standardized form for project approval from all 3 TIF districts.
- **Purinton:** districts all handled differently and EBURD does not use 5 to 1.
- **Neese and Mayor:** agree with standardized form.
- **Joe Studiner, TBID Board:** invites Council to attend a meeting. TBID did amazing job during COVID. Were at 10% occupancy 1 year ago, have had 90% occupancy recently. Visit Billings has reached out to bring visitors to City.
- **Alex Tyson, Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID):** gave a PowerPoint presentation of how Visit Billings reached visitors and overview of numbers. Pre-COVID impacts on City, strategic properties. Goals and plans for Great American Road Trip media, market mix, and social media ideas.
- **Alyson Murnion, Marketing:** gave an overview of marketing strategy, visitors want to visit wide open spaces, path for every personality.
- **Purinton:** where does money come from? Tyson: part of bed tax.
- **Purinton:** role in MetraPark? Tyson: members of TBID Board, stakeholders etc. on numerous committees as part of MetraPark process.
- **Ronning:** how to get Air bnb revenues into City? Big Sky Rail Authority? Tyson: Steve Warlich is board member and has an Air bnb. See some collections through State lodging tax. Air dnd is survey that helps research information. \$30,000 to TBID budget. Interested in Big Sky Rail Authority but cost prohibitive.
- **Joy:** legislation focus? Tyson: things turned out stronger than anticipated. Studiner may answer regarding concerns. Public Safety and marijuana laws being monitored closely.
- **Choriki:** stronger social media focus. Murnion: advertising on TikTok, but not active. Will be adding soon.
- **Neese:** get rules changed through legislation? Studiner: working towards and will get back with CM Neese with more info.
- **Neese:** market to other larger areas? Murnion: focus on people showing MT type behavioral interests, attend show in Los Angeles. Focus on areas with easy access to MT.
- **Katy Easton, CEO Downtown BID:** PowerPoint presentation of programs, community events, budget, and revenues. **Joe Stout BID Director**
- **Neese:** vacant downtown stores issue? Easton: work hard to create vibrant downtown, clean and safe initiatives to create attractive space. Help property owners to install lighting, art projects, etc.
- **Public Comment:**
- **Kevin Nelson, 4235 Bruce Ave., Billings, MT,** states his wife wanted to know why the SBURA couldn't pay for 2 additional police officers to serve South Billings area. Stated street maintenance assessments were inconsistent throughout the City. Some properties were assessed less per lot size than others and he wanted to understand the system for assessing.
- **Ed Gulick, 3015 10th Ave. N., Billings, MT,** was happy to learn that the old streetlights in his neighborhood would be replaced with LED streetlights and he hoped it would happen soon. He suggested that Parking Garages 1, 2 and 3 be renamed and branded because no one knew which one was which. Rename

them so they were more identifiable. Encouraged a Cost of Services study, saying it held enormous value.

- **Jennifer Owen, Billings Heights Task Force, Billings, MT**, offered the Task Force’s support to do whatever needed to get the Inner Belt Loop finished. Thrilled about the BUILD grant, encouraged Council to feed infrastructure funds to the IBL project. Commended Louis Engels who serves on the Energy Commission with her and others, for his professionalism and innovation.
- **Andy Zoeller, Finance Director:** gave an overview of the changes to the budget PowerPoint presentation and reviewed the summary that Council had received. He included the Council inquiry rate of growth overview and the budget adoption schedule.
- **Ronning:** Made motion directing staff to bring to the June 7th Work Session, a Public Information Officer job description, salary, etc., to include in FY2022 budget under City Administration for review, seconded by Shaw.
- **Neese:** position could pay for itself with grants.
- **Joy:** possible to fund through Administration? Not comfortable using reserves.
- **Kukulski:** will bring back information.
- Motion passed 10-1, Yakawich opposed.
- **Purinton:** requests Ms. Meling respond to Mr. Nelson’s issue regarding Street Maintenance Districts (PMD’s).
- **Kukulski:** high level overview, caps are not problem and are legal. Inconsistency within departments portions. More detail will be brought to Council.
- **Ewalt:** asks Mr. Zoeller for summary of percentages of increases. Kukulski: rate adjustments in all departments are included.
- **Mayor:** 30,000 foot view of budgeting trends and comparisons with national statistics.
- **Neese:** Municipal Court judge election added to the budget. Proactive Code Enforcement needs to be a policy decision within Council.
- **Joy:** have discussed the topic over the last 3 years, died due to lack of Council support.
- **Kukulski:** additional 3 FTE’s will probably not allow for patrolling areas, prioritize complaints.
- **Mayor:** common sense allows for issues to be addressed if seen.

TOPIC #2	ADDED TO AGENDA BY MAYOR COLE Public Safety Mill Levy Discussion
PRESENTER	Chris Kukulski, City Administrator
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Kukulski:** Reviewed timeline to advertise for public hearing and 1st reading of an ordinance concerning placing the PSLM on the primary election ballot vs. general election ballot. Reviewed the number of mills for assessment should the levy be voter approved for either the primary election or the general election. Address wording of ballot and adding Fire Station 8 at a later date. Can get mills but not levy the maximum amount.

- Council agreed that the timeline to meet the September 14th Primary Election was too tight and directed staff to bring the first reading to the June 14th Regular Business Meeting, second reading on June 28th and passage of resolution concerning the ballot language. It would go before the voters at the November 2nd General Election, and collection of the mills would begin in November 2023.
- **Public Comment:**
- None
- **Kukulski:** Council comfortable with moving back to City Hall on July 6th? Will not have the capability of hybrid option immediately.
- **Neese:** staff needs to be in City Hall but public comment could be through Zoom. Ok with July.
- **Mayor:** huge burden to staff to sit in Council Chambers for hours. Leave to City Administrator discretion.
- **Choriki:** understand both sides. Advocate technology being used for public sector. Don't want to lose momentum of public comment and better engagement.
- **Boyett:** need to go back to Chambers and fix the sound issues.

TOPIC #3	Council Discussion
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- Jennifer Owen, 906 Royal Avenue, Billings, Montana, advocate for Heights Parks. Castlerock pavilions important and encourage support.

TOPIC #4	Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- None