

Adopted 2021/2022 City Council Priorities Progress Report

January 14, 2022

#1 PRIORITY

- ✚ **Improve the safety of Billings** – *Voters approved the 2021 public safety mill levy on November 2, 2021. 61% voted for and 39% voted against the levy. The levy provides ~\$7.1 million annually to implement strategies to improve the safety of Billings including the Center for Public Safety Management (CPSM) recommendations. The additional tax dollars begin to be collected in November 2022. Budget amendments will be presented to the Council January 24 to begin implementing some of the financial investments during the current fiscal year.*
 - Determine Council’s support to implement the policy implications recommended in the Center for Public Safety Management (CPSM) law enforcement analysis. *A strong majority of Council supported the CPSM police department analysis. Eighty (80) of the 102 recommendations have been completed, are underway or are contingent upon Council approval of a budget amendment scheduled for January 24 consideration.*
 - Resolve criminal justice facility space deficiencies. *The city purchased the Stillwater building on October 15. The architect team is under contract. Community and department engagements are scheduled throughout the first quarter of 2022. We expect to move the first group of employees into the building in early 2023. The facility will meet our anticipated criminal justice space needs for several decades.*
 - Understand and determine the Council’s level of support for the policy implications recommended in the CPSM fire department analysis. *A strong majority of Council supported the CPSM fire department analysis. Of the 34 recommendations, 18 are implemented, 10 are in progress, 4 require negotiated changes to the labor contract, 2 are tied to the state of MT (1 legislative and 1 wildland interface in the Billings region). Implementing the medical response teams is arguably the most impactful recommendation for FD. The requested budget amendment launches this program by funding the program’s leader. The firefighter/paramedics will be included in the 2023 budget.*
 - Determine policy level support to Implement Code Enforcement, Legal and Municipal Court strategies to improve safety. *The 2021 PSML includes resource investments to increase the capacity of code enforcement, legal department, and the municipal court. The city’s first full time code enforcement manager started in her new role January 10. We are working through code enforcement, legal, and municipal court space challenges to implement our public safety strategies as soon as possible.*
 - Analyze funding options and determine the best methods to improve the safety of Billings. *The FY2022 budget includes the full implementation of our recently negotiated BUFSA (Billings Urban Fire Service Area) agreement between the City and County. The agreement increased the city’s revenue by ~\$453,000 over the previous agreement. The new BUFSA payment ties the City’s FD budget and the taxable value of properties within the BUFSA together. The 2021 PSML was created to meet our community’s public safety needs. The ballot also included a 3% marijuana tax to assist the county and city, however the revenue is not expected to cover anticipated increased costs. A collaboration between the city, county and state will add \$3M to the City’s \$1M over the next three (3) years to fight violent crime increases related to the pandemic.*

Data collection to better understand who or what are “cost causers” may help us shift some of these costs in the future. We know that both alcohol and drugs create millions of dollars of annual cost, but very little of the taxes collected on these substances is shared with the city. Therefore, property owners within the city limits are paying for nearly all services impacted by alcohol and drugs.

- *Adopt massage and spa facilities business license ordinance. The Council adopted this ordinance April 26, 2021. To date, 58 solo practitioner applications have been reviewed and granted. Eight (8) businesses have been fully licensed, four (4) have been denied, and one (1) is in the review process. Additionally, 68 solo practitioner applications have been reviewed and granted. We suspect that there are three (3) businesses that have not applied for a license and may need to.*
- *Support critical partnerships w/Substance Abuse Connect (SAC), Yellowstone County, and Continuum of Care partnerships and determine options for addressing substance abuse and mental health needs. I am a member of the executive board for SAC. Grants have been received to fund a Mobile Response Team (MRT) in 2022. SAC will be updating the Council during the first quarter of 2022. The discussion will include the police and fire chief’s along with our downtown partners.*
- *Continue improving sidewalk and trails network improving safe routes to schools. Annually, approx. \$1.8M is spent constructing and rebuilding sidewalks within the city. \$400,000 for ADA ramps, \$700,000 to improve sidewalk and \$700,000 tied to development and road reconstruction projects. We are conducting a Safe Routes to School Plan Update focused on the 22 elementary schools in Billings Public Schools. The Plan Update will contain a prioritized list of Safe Routes projects so that projects can be equitably implemented across the city. A Phase 2 Safe Routes to School Plan will begin in 2022 and will consider Billings Public Schools middle schools, private schools, and County schools in the Billings Urbanized area.*

ONGOING CRITICAL PROJECTS

Break ground on west side water treatment plant and visionary reservoir project.

The City has entered contracts with two (2) contractors: COP Construction to construct the raw water pipeline and Garney to construct the Water Treatment Plant. The material supply issue will be a factor with these projects, but they are moving forward into the construction phase. The city is pursuing a \$50M BRIC grant and should hear the results in June/July 2022. Any construction work started before the grant award would not be eligible so the construction will start after we receive the results of the grant. Given the high construction costs that we are seeing, the estimate for the work has increased beyond the current budget. The project team is undertaking a value engineering process to reduce the costs. This work will be completed before the grant award.

Continue airport terminal reconstruction project, building Montana’s greatest airport.

The airport project is moving as aggressively as the supply chain will allow. Delays in finishing materials has shifted the opening of the Phase 2 area (Concourse A and Great Room) to April 1, 2022. With the opening of the Concourse A, the airlines will begin to use the new Gates and Passenger Loading Bridges, but the concession spaces will lag a few additional months before opening, although temporary services will be available. The contractor will then move to Phase 2B which includes connecting the new Concourse and Great Room to the older building and adding an additional skylight over the new screening que area. Once that is done in the early summer the TSA screening will be moved up to the new space that dumps out onto the new concourse. The Phase 3 work will follow and take place in the old screening area and includes demolishing the old stairs

and escalator and rebuilding the area into the new reception hall. At the same time the Phase 4 work will begin which is the demolition and rebuild of the Concourse B area. Projected completion of the total project is likely in the last quarter of 2023. The staff has done an excellent job of receiving over \$30 million in FAA grants for the project and anticipates some additional dollars from the Infrastructure Bill will go towards the project as well.

- ✚ **Continue progress to break ground on the Inner-Belt Loop (IBL) and Skyline Trail projects.** *The enclosed link <https://ci.billings.mt.us/2964/BUILD-Grant-2021> provides the month-by-month update to the IBL and Skyline Trail BUILD grant projects.*
- ✚ **Resolve conflicts with Heights Water District (HWD) to improve development and redevelopment opportunities within the Billings Heights area.** *We are currently on hold, several negotiation sessions were held between the city and HWD however the HWD recently changed their board leadership. Debi Melling and I have a meeting scheduled with their interim manager Larry Brewster for early February.*

HIGH PRIORITIES

- ✚ **Create a park and trail development program and analyze all park and trail funding options to build excellent parks and trails throughout the city.** *Park and trail development and operations funding options were presented to the Council March 15, 2021. Staff continues to apply for grants to fund trails, but local funding is still needed to create a consistent program and to get projects ready for grant applications.*

The 2021 legislature passed a law sunsetting Park District 1 (PD1) in 2024 unless voters decide to continue the funding system. Approx. 1/3 of the parks funding comes from this source (~\$3.1M). We should not wait until 2024 to ask voters to approve whichever funding approach the council determines is best. To make sure we are asking voters to consider the correct level of funding, we first need to determine:

- 1 – Are current operation, maintenance, & replacement levels meeting your expectation?*
- 2 – Does the council want to invest in developing additional parks and trails?*
- 3 – As the city moves forward with the next phase of the recreation center project, what level of support will the facility receive from general taxpayers?*

To help answer these questions, we all need to remind ourselves what is in the 2017 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan and council should consider defining your vision/objective for parks, trails, open space and recreation facilities. That answer will guide our staff and the council as you answer the three questions and determine what voters will be presented with in 2023 or 2024.

- ✚ **Complete Billings Bypass Corridor Study in preparation for utility extensions and development.** *The Billings Bypass is under construction now by MDT and all the various phases (Yellowstone River Bridge, Johnson Lane Interchange, Railroad Bridge Crossing) are estimated to be completed by 2025. The Billings Bypass Corridor Study (www.billingsbypasscorridor.com) is looking at the northern section of the corridor from the Yellowstone River north to Highway 312 and Main Street. The study is meant to determine future access, utility needs, and development guidance along the corridor anticipating future development to be in the city. Completion of the study is expected in Spring 2022.*
- ✚ **Define strategy to complete cost of services studies to help fund police, fire, parks and trails, storm water and transportation infrastructure in partnership with Yellowstone County.** *Except*

for negotiating a more equitable cost sharing for regional fire services with Yellowstone County, we have not made headway on accomplishing this priority.

- ✚ Regulate medical marijuana dispensaries/storefronts. Analyze land use and financial impacts of legalized recreational use of marijuana in the City and recommend policy improvements.** *Regulations were developed, vetted and adopted by the city council in late 2021 and were in place prior to the January 1, 2022, deadline. This week, we rolled out the business license application process. We won't know until March 31 if we need to conduct a lottery to determine who will receive the 8 medical marijuana dispensaries allowed.*
- ✚ Stimulate redevelopment within downtown and other business districts.** *Project Re-Code became effective in March 2021. The new code has several provisions to promote redevelopment. More work needs to be done to incentivize infill development projects. Utilization of the Downtown Urban Renewal District and its TIF provision for support of redevelopment projects in the Downtown continues to move forward through the Council project approval process. I believe we should consider setting a goal of developing 1,000 housing units within the core of our city over the next 5 years. Residents are one of the most significant keys to improving both safety and business viability within our downtown. The market is proving that there is a meaningful demand for housing downtown.*
- ✚ Resolve city hall facility space deficiencies (see criminal justice center space needs).** *We purchased the Stillwater building on October 15. This facility is expected to meet the city's space needs for several decades into the future. We need to discuss if the council would like to define the vision/objectives for this project beyond meeting the space needs of the organization. Community and department engagements are scheduled throughout the first quarter of 2022. We expect to move the first group of employees into the building in early 2023.*
- ✚ Participate in the 2021 legislative process to support adopted legislative priorities and pass legislation to improve the safety of Billings.** *The city succeeded in passing legislation to help move state prisoners out of county jails and into State facilities. This legislation, and our ongoing dialogue with the Dept. of Corrections is working (unfortunately, our need for jail space continues to grow at a faster pace than the jails capacity). We hosted two (2) well attended Zoom legislative sessions and we participated directly in shaping legislation throughout the session with the help of Greg Dorrington and Aimee Grmoljez. We have already begun meeting with legislators in preparation for the 2023 legislative session. Approx. 35 individuals attended our November 10 regional legislative breakfast and approx. 100 attended last evenings public safety forum to discuss crime issues that are negatively affecting our community.*
- ✚ Monitor the implementation of project Re-Code, according to the staff recommended schedule (4, 7, and 12 months).** *The Council received the four-month progress report in August 2021. The next update is scheduled for January 18, 2022.*