

**MINUTES  
OF THE BILLINGS CITY COUNCIL  
REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING  
December 18, 2023**

The Billings City Council met in regular session in the Council Chambers located on the second floor of the Police Facility, 220 North 27th Street, Billings, Montana, at 5:30 P.M.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor Cole

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Mayor Cole

**INVOCATION:** ~~Councilmember Shaw~~ Mayor Cole

**ROLL CALL:**

Present: Councilmember Ed Gulick, Ward I  
Councilmember Roy Neese, Ward II  
Councilmember Jennifer Owen, Ward II  
Councilmember Denise Joy, Ward III  
Councilmember Danny Choriki, Ward III  
Councilmember Daniel Tidswell, Ward IV  
Councilmember Pam Purinton, Ward IV  
Councilmember Mike Boyett, Ward V  
Councilmember Tom Rupsis, Ward V  
Mayor William Cole

Absent/

Excused: Councilmember Kendra Shaw, Ward I

Staff

Present: Chris Kukulski, City Administrator  
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator  
Karen Schexnider, Assistant City Attorney  
Denise Bohlman, City Clerk  
Wyeth Friday, Planning Director  
Andy Zoeller, Finance Director  
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager

**MINUTES:**

- December 11, 2023 - Pending

**COURTESIES:**

- Mayor Cole recognized outgoing Councilmembers Choriki and Purinton and presented them with service plaques.

- Mayor Cole spoke about sending engraved wooden ornaments depicting the USS Billings on it to the navel crews in Jacksonville, FL. He mentioned that the USS Billings littoral combat ship won the best-looking ship 3 times. He passed extra ornaments to the Councilmembers.

### **PROCLAMATIONS:**

Mayor Cole proclaimed December 21, 2023, as Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.

### **COUNCIL REPORTS:**

There were no Council reports.

### **ADMINISTRATOR REPORTS - CHRIS KUKULSKI**

- Mr. Kukulski mentioned this was the last Council meeting for 2023. The next Council meeting was a Work Session on Tuesday, January 2nd. New Councilmembers would be sworn in during that meeting.
- Mr. Kukulski reminded Council that a Council Orientation session was scheduled for Tuesday, December 19th, from 1:30-4:30 PM in the City Hall Conference Room.
- He also reminded them that a community partners meeting would be held at City College from 11 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. on December 19<sup>th</sup>, too.
- He mentioned that Wyeth Friday, Planning Director, sent an ex-parte communication to the Mayor and Council after 3 P.M. concerning Regular Agenda Item 7. The correspondence was placed in the Ex-Parte notebook located at the back of Council Chambers for public viewing.

**PUBLIC COMMENT on "NON-PUBLIC HEARING" Agenda Items: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 ONLY. Speaker sign-in required.** (Comments are limited to three (3) minutes or as set by the Mayor. Please sign the roster at the cart located at the back of the Council chambers or at the podium. Comments on items listed as public hearing items will be heard ONLY during the designated public hearing time for each respective item. For items not on this agenda, public comment will be taken at the end of the agenda.)

The following individuals provided public comment:

- **Steve Arveschoug, Executive Director, Big Sky Economic Development,** expressed gratitude to Councilmember Purinton for serving as an ex-officio board member and presented her with a gift of appreciation. He mentioned the open ex-officio board member needed to be filled by January 11th and he encouraged Council to quickly consider that recommendation and forward it to the Yellowstone County Commissioners to officially act on the appointment.
- **Carrisa Sundeen, Executive Director, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Yellowstone County Chapter,** announced she was new to the position and the organization was dying. She sought mentors and funding to keep the organization alive and help the community's youth. She thanked Councilmember Owen for her support.

- **Tim Mascarena, Chairman of the Board of the Billings Leadership Foundation**, mentioned that it oversees the Montana Rescue Mission (MRM), and Friendship House of Christian Services. He voiced his support for MRM and its dedicated staff and spoke of the progress made toward a new campus to further help the homeless. He provided statistics of the many successes afforded the community.
- **Matt Lundgren, Executive Director, Montana Rescue Mission (MRM)**, wished to address inaccurate information provided to Council concerning MRM operations.

There were no further speakers.

**1. CONSENT AGENDA -- Separations: 1A1**

Mayor Cole separated Consent Agenda Item 1A1 for discussion concerning the appointment of Elijah Tidswell, 14 below, and for the recusal of Councilmember Tidswell.

Discussions between Karen Schexneider, Assistant City Attorney, and Councilmembers was held concerning avoiding an appearance of impropriety or conflict that Councilmember Tidswell abstain from the vote. She confirmed the age of board members as 18 years or older per the Montana Constitution.

**Motion:** I move to approve the items of the Consent Agenda as submitted, with the exception of Item 1A1.

Moved by Councilmember Boyett

Seconded by Councilmember Purinton

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**A. Mayor Cole recommends that Council confirm the following appointments:**

1.

	Name	Board/Commission	Term	
			Begins	Ends
1	Megan Bostrom	Aviation and Transit Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
2	Denis Pitman	Aviation and Transit Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
3	Marcell Bruski	Billings BID	01/01/24	12/31/28
4	No Applications	Billings BID	01/01/24	12/31/28
5	Dave Hagstrom	Board of Appeals	01/01/24	12/31/28
6	Deborah Davis	Board of Health	01/01/24	12/31/27
7	No Applications	Community Development Low Mod*	01/01/24	12/31/26
8	No Applications	Community Development Low Mod	01/01/24	12/31/28
9	No Applications	Community Development Low Mod	01/01/24	12/31/28
10	Hannah Reno	Housing Authority	01/01/24	12/31/29
11	Amanda Taylor	Housing Authority	01/01/24	12/31/29
12	M. Gale Stott	Housing Authority Family Resident	01/01/24	12/31/26

		Comm		
13	Eric Johnson	Human Relations Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28
14	Elijah Tidswell	Human Relations Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28
15	No Applications	Human Relations Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28
16	Susan Plath	Library Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
17	Thom MacLean	Parking Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
18	Larry Mathew	Parking Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
19	No Applications	Police Board	01/01/24	12/31/27
20	Nicole Cromwell	Public Works Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
21	Ken Behling	Public Works Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
22	Kevin Christofanelli	Public Works Board	01/01/24	12/31/28
23	Roger Gravgaard	Yellowstone Planning Board - Ward 2	01/01/24	12/31/26
24	Keith Edgerton	Yellowstone Historic Preservation	01/01/24	12/31/26
25	Greg McCall	Zoning Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28
26	David Goss	Zoning Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28
27	Beau Mulvaney	Zoning Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28
28	Andy Megorden	Zoning Commission	01/01/24	12/31/28

\* 7 Unfilled vacancy

**Motion:** I move to approve Consent Agenda Item 1A1, confirming the appointment of Elijah Tidswell, 14, as recommended by Mayor Cole.

Councilmember Tidswell recused himself from the vote.

Moved by Councilmember Purinton

Seconded by Councilmember Owen

**APPROVED 9-0**, Councilmembers Shaw Absent/Excused; Tidswell Abstained.

**B. Bid Awards: None**

**C. Memorandum of Understanding** with Yellowstone County establishing the Montana Opioid Abatement Trust (MOAT) committee.

Moved by Councilmember Boyett

Seconded by Councilmember Purinton

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**D. Bills for the Week of:**

1. November 20, 2023

Moved by Councilmember Boyett

Seconded by Councilmember Purinton

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**REGULAR AGENDA:**

**2. PUBLIC HEARING**, adoption and execution of the amended Program of Projects by Billings MET Transit. Staff recommends approval.

Rusty Logan, MET Transit Manager, explained the formalities for holding a public hearing concerning operating expenses.

No public testimony was given.

**Motion:** Having conducted a public hearing, considered written and spoken public testimony, I move to approve the adoption and execution of the amended Program of Projects by Billings MET Transit, as recommended by staff.

Moved by Councilmember Gulick  
Seconded by Councilmember Tidswell

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**3. AGREEMENT** with YWCA to fund a Family Justice Center coordinator position. Staff recommends approval.

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator, outlined the strategic plan goals. He mentioned the VISTA currently serving the YWCA was nearing the end of her term and the coordinator position would need to be filled. The agreement indicated the City would contribute \$55,000 annually to the YWCA for the position for 2 years, with 2 one-year extensions possible. The employee would be that of the YWCA, not the City. Recruiting could begin immediately upon Council's approval of the agreement.

Erin Lambert, Executive Director, YWCA, spoke in support of the agreement. She clarified that the coordinator position would move the strategic plan forward to gain a Family Justice Center, but a director and possibly 3 additional positions would later be needed.

Council and staff spoke about the collaboration needed between the City, YWCA and other community partners; and applying for grants. Discussions continued about leaders in the community attending other Family Justice Centers around the country to familiarize themselves with the programs' successes.

**Motion:** I move to approve entering into an agreement with YWCA to fund a Family Justice Center coordinator position, as recommended by staff.

Moved by Councilmember Tidswell  
Seconded by Councilmember Neese

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**4. TAX INCREMENT FINANCING ASSISTANCE** from the South Billings Boulevard Tax Increment Finance District (TIFD) to Rimrock Hospitality Billings, LLC, for reimbursement of qualified expenses associated with the construction of a new hotel at 4750 King Avenue East, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$346,201, as recommended by South Billings Urban Renewal Association (SBURA) Board.

Dick Zier, SBBURD Consultant, provided a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the specifics of the TIF application and qualified expenses. The proposed hotel would have

122 rooms; provide permanent jobs, and be owned by a franchisee. He explained that the new businesses in the area had provided significant increases to the tax increment district, allowing for more investments.

Greg Gastineau, of Rimrock Hospitality Billings, LLC, appeared via Zoom and addressed Council's questions concerning complete sidewalk installation.

**Motion:** I move to conditionally approve tax increment financing assistance from the South Billings Boulevard Tax Increment Finance District (TIFD) to Rimrock Hospitality Billings, LLC, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$346,201, as recommended by South Billings Urban Renewal Association (SBURA) Board.

Moved by Councilmember Joy  
Seconded by Councilmember Rupsis

Councilmember Joy spoke to developing commercial properties to ease residential tax burdens; utilizing space that had been vacant for years; and because the project was a hotel, every person that stayed there would pay a \$2/night bed tax. She added that Airbnb and other temporary rentals did not provide that.

Mr. Zier and Council discussed tax valuations of projects.

Councilmember Gulick indicated desired changes to the TIF policy in 2024, i.e., preference for using local talent in all levels of projects to recirculate local dollars, especially on franchise projects.

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**5. TAX INCREMENT FINANCING ASSISTANCE** from the South Billings Boulevard Tax Increment Finance District (TIFD) to Billings School District No. 2 (SD2), for reimbursement of qualified expenses for the solar installation project at Riverside Middle School, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$100,000, as recommended by South Billings Urban Renewal Association (SBURA) Board.

Dick Zier, SBBURD Consultant, provided a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the specifics of the TIF application and qualified expenses. He explained that Northwestern Energy had granted \$60,000 toward the project and the TIF monies would be used for public benefit.

Scott Reiter, Executive Director for Facilities for School District 2, appeared via Zoom and explained the School District's goal to introduce solar projects on all its schools. Riverside Middle School was estimated to save about \$10,000 in utility costs, annually, should the project move forward.

Council discussed the possibility of sunseting the SBURA and funds going to the School District should that happen; IRA tax incentives up to 30% of the cost, Section 64-17; and renewable energy sources.

**Motion:** I move to conditionally approve tax increment financing assistance from the South Billings Boulevard Tax Increment Finance District (TIFD) to Billings School District No. 2 (SD2), for reimbursement of qualified expenses for the solar installation

project at Riverside Middle School, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$100,000, as recommended by South Billings Urban Renewal Association (SBURA) Board.

Moved by Councilmember Joy  
Seconded by Councilmember Rupsis

Councilmember Joy mentioned then the installation of extra lighting around Riverside Middle School had improved security and safety. However, those improvements had also increased its utility usage and it would be appropriate to support using public dollars to benefit a public school.

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**6. TAX INCREMENT FINANCING ASSISTANCE** from the East Billings Urban Renewal District (EBURD) to Undammed Distillery for reimbursement of qualified expenses at 116 North 11th Street for a new tasting room, production and sales facility, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$82,600, as recommended by the Billings Industrial Revitalization District (BIRD) Board.

Michelle Harkins, BIRD Director, provided a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the specifics of the TIF application and qualified expenses. She noted that the business wished to stay in the EBURD area and that was important.

Alan Hodges, Hodges Holding, LLC, applicant, spoke about the business he started 3 years ago needing more space to meet demand. He shared his plans to increase production in the coming years. He explained the distillery was named after the Yellowstone River, being the longest undammed river and the named different spirits after the river's tributaries.

Mr. Hodges and Council discussed alcohol education and safety; regulations for tasting rooms; and property valuations and acquisitions.

**Motion:** I move to conditionally approve tax increment financing assistance from the East Billings Urban Renewal District (EBURD) to Undammed Distillery for reimbursement of qualified expenses at 116 North 11th Street for a new tasting room, production and sales facility, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$82,600, as recommended by the Billings Industrial Revitalization District (BIRD) Board.

Moved by Councilmember Joy  
Seconded by Councilmember Boyett

Councilmember Gulick abstained from the vote noting his employer was the architect involved in the project.

Councilmember Joy understood the discussion about the harmful impacts of alcohol on society but supported a Billings business that also cared about its community and responsibly distributed its products.

Councilmember Neese voiced his support for a local small business but encouraged those in the alcohol industry to place more support toward those most negatively impacted by alcohol.

Mayor Cole mentioned land acquisitions needed to be considered more closely.

**APPROVED 9-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused; Councilmember Gulick Abstained.

**7. TAX INCREMENT FINANCING ASSISTANCE** from the East Billings Urban Renewal District (EBURD) to BIRD Streets, LLC (Billings Brownstones) for reimbursement of qualified expenses for the demolition, and abatement, to build a 22-unit housing complex at 216 - 224 North 18th Street, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$86,776 \$56,154.55, as recommended by the Billings Industrial Revitalization District (BIRD) Board.

Michelle Harkins, BIRD Director, provided a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the specifics of the TIF application and qualified expenses. Ms. Harkins noted that the applicants had revised their ask from \$86,776 to \$56,154.55 at a 5:1 ratio of private investment for the first phase of the project. She explained that Tiffany and Duane Youngren had completed dozens of projects in the EBURD over the years and outlined their various projects that had improved the residential market in the area. She explained the current state of the properties and what needed to be done. She explained phase 2 of the project.

Duane and Tiffany Youngren spoke about their investments in the area and providing quality residences. They explained that property in the EBURD was expensive and due to the poor condition of the houses on the subject property, major renovation expenses would be involved. They indicated they would return during Phase 2 of the project with an additional TIF application.

Councilmember Owen noted that childcare was lacking in the EBURD and would the Youngrens consider something about that. Discussions continued about security needs and appropriate space for childcare.

Ms. Harkins spoke about the necessity for small developers to do projects in phases due to money constraints.

**Motion:** I move to conditionally approve tax increment financing assistance from the East Billings Urban Renewal District (EBURD) to BIRD Streets, LLC (Billings Brownstones) for reimbursement of qualified expenses for the demolition, and abatement, to build a 22-unit housing complex at 216 - 224 North 18th Street, to a maximum reimbursement of up to \$56,154.55, as recommended by the Billings Industrial Revitalization District (BIRD) Board.

Moved by Councilmember Joy  
Seconded by Councilmember Boyett

**APPROVED 10-0**, Councilmember Shaw Absent/Excused.

**PUBLIC COMMENT on "NON-AGENDA ITEMS". Speaker Sign-in required.**  
*(Restricted to ONLY items not on this printed agenda. Comments are limited to 3 minutes or as set by the Mayor. Please sign the roster at the cart located at the back of the Council chambers or at the podium.)*

There were no speakers.

**COUNCIL INITIATIVES:**

There were no Council initiatives.

**ADJOURN:** 7:30 P.M.



CITY OF BILLINGS

BY: William A Cole  
William A. Cole, Mayor

ATTEST:

BY: Denise R. Bohlman  
Denise R. Bohlman, City Clerk