



## BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

City of Billings & Yellowstone County  
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 23, 2024 MEETING TIME: 11:30 am  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room of 2825 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. N

APPROVED BY A MOTION ON FEBRUARY 27, 2024

- Call to order:** Nikki Zimmer, BPAC Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:31 am.
- Members present:** Kristi Drake, City; Dave Coppock, Planning Board; Anna O'Donnell, City; Jason Wood, County; Joan Schey, County
- Others present:** Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner; Jesus Ochoa, Billings Police Department Volunteer Coordinator

### Public Comment Period:

- a. **Comments on items not on the agenda and request to add items to future agendas –**  
None
- b. **Online comments and comments received by the Active Transportation Planner –**  
A resident wrote in and said that the flashing light on Virginia Ln near Pioneer Park was out, so the city sent someone out to fix it.

A resident wrote that Plainview Ave. experiences significant foot traffic, and a citizen has observed numerous instances of close calls. To address this concern, they recommended taking out the median, creating a turning lane, putting in a bike lane, and creating a no parking zone near the entrance of Plainview off Central. As that would be a long-term project, Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner, has sent this concern on to engineering. There was no contact information on the complaint, so Elyse was not able to respond to the resident.

**Motion. Approval of the meeting minutes of November 28, 2023:** Dave Coppock, BPAC member, moved to accept the minutes. Jason Wood, BPAC member, seconded. All voted in favor.

### New Business:

- a. **Discussion about volunteer trail patrol with volunteer coordinator Jesus Ochoa**  
Jesus Ochoa has worked as the Billings Police Department (BPD) Volunteer Coordinator since March 2023. He has about 23 active volunteers who mostly help with abandoned vehicles and paperwork.

Jesus does not have information about how the trail patrol program was run in the past but has done research and found well-run volunteer trail patrol organizations across the country.

Kristi Drake, BPAC member, mentioned that the previous volunteer coordinator managed the program. She committed to inquire with Billings Trail Net about the availability of volunteers. Jesus said the BPD would providing volunteers with first aid and CPR training. Jesus highlighted the necessity of having volunteers who can help fix flats. He affirmed that he and Kristi would coordinate efforts for this program.

Jesus explained that trail patrol volunteers wear brightly colored Police Volunteer t-shirts and are required to ride in pairs to enhance safety and mutual support in other communities. In the past, there were typically 15-30 volunteers. BPD Officer Nick Lamb used to be on patrol the trails.

Jesus mentioned that it is challenging to find volunteers on the weekends, but that this effort may be different as volunteers would be out on the trails. BPAC members suggested covering the main hours of trail use during the weekend. BPAC members recommended that safety and etiquette education could be integrated into the volunteer's work.

BPAC discussed that there might be places that they might want to frequent like the Main Street underpass. Kristi proposed that volunteers give out a card with trail etiquette.

**b. Chair and Vice-Chair elections**

Anna O'Donnell, BPAC member, nominated Dave for Vice Chair. Nikki Zimmer, BPAC Chair, motioned to elect Dave as Vice Chair. Joan Schey, BPAC member, seconded. All voted in favor.

Kristi nominated Nikki for Chair. Dave moved to elect Nikki elected as Chair. Jason seconded. All voted in favor.

**c. Annual presentation to governing bodies date selection:**

Possible dates and primary selections:

Planning Board

Feb. 13

Feb. 27

March 12 – Primary selection (Attended by Dave and Anna)

March 26 – Secondary selection

Council

Feb. 20

March 4

March 18 – Selection (Attended by Kristi, Joan, and Dave)

April 1

Commissioners

March 19<sup>th</sup>, Tuesdays at 9:30 am - March 19<sup>th</sup> (Attended by Nikki and Jason)

Anna, BPAC member, suggested that there be clarifying questions and rebuttals when presenting to the council and asked if BPAC members can respond. Elyse will discuss it with Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director.

Kristi will make the first effort to update the presentation from last year. She aims to finalize the presentation and submit it to the committee by February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

#### **d. Presentation of Billings TrailNet Survey results**

Kristi presented the Billings TrailNet Survey result. Project goals were to determine where people want trails, whether people would support trails with a mill levy, identify benefits people ascribe to trails locally, and how Billings Trail Net could raise its profile. This year, the survey experienced increased participation, attributed to the implementation of incentives.

The survey found that 70% of respondents used trails regularly (daily, weekly, and monthly). The highest use of trails is from pedestrians. According to the survey, the top three desired trail projects are the 5<sup>th</sup> Ave Corridor, the N. 27<sup>th</sup> St. side path (Yellowjacket Trail), and Grand Ave West (west of Shiloh Rd.). The most common barriers to not using trails are distance, lack of facilities, and lack of information. Most people (64%) prefer linear trails that connect to important places rather than loop trails. 83% of respondents were not members of Billings TrailNet. 77% had a very positive or positive opinion about Billings TrailNet. 51% of respondents were from the west end, 30% in the heights, 12% from downtown, 7% from south Billings and Lockwood. Most respondents (56%) were over 55 years old. Most (70%) of respondents were female. Most respondents (76%) had graduated from college.

Conclusions from the survey:

1. The majority of residents actively engage with trails.
2. Pedestrians are the predominant user group on these trails.
3. Proposing bike user fees to pay for trails is considered unfair, given the user base.
4. Referring to trails as "bike trails" might create a misleading impression about the primary users.
5. Need increased signage and restroom facilities along the trails.
6. Should prioritize more interconnected linear trails between neighborhoods and other destinations.

Kristi shared more data that had been collected concerning potential new trails, trail connections, and desired amenities. This information was sourced from the TrailNet survey, last year's BPAC surveys, and informal surveys conducted by the Parks and Mill Levy group. The three most mentioned were Coulson Park-River (36 times), Heights to Downtown (17 times), and Alkali Creek (17 times).

Kristi requested that if any BPAC members have any suggestions on how to optimize the questions or methods for the survey to write them down and email them to her.

#### **Old Business:**

##### **a. Review and mapping of PD crash data**

BPAC members mapped crashes from December and January.

#### **Other Business:**

Dave raised a concern about inconsistent placement of stop signs along the Skyline trail, with some positioned before and others after the trail. Additionally, he noted the absence of stop signs near private drives. Elyse will communicate with engineers to address this issue. Another identified hazard pertains to walls obstructing cyclists' vision, warranting further attention.

Kristi shared with the committee details about a webinar hosted by the Rails to Trails Conservancy. The webinar will discuss the Federal Highway Administration's first ever launch of the application period for a new active transportation infrastructure initiative. It will provide practical tips on how to capitalize on this opportunity and emphasized the significance of establishing a dedicated funding source for trail and active transportation networks. This information may be of interest to members of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) and council members. The webinar is planned for Wednesday, January the 24<sup>th</sup> at 1PM eastern standard time.

**Future agenda items:** None

**Dave moved to adjourn; Joan seconded. All voted in favor.**