



**VISION STATEMENT:**  
"The Magic City: A diverse,  
welcoming community  
where people prosper and  
business succeeds."

## WORK SESSION SUMMARY

**Council Chambers**  
**316 N. 26<sup>th</sup> St.**

**July 21, 2025**

**5:30 P.M.**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor Cole

Present: Councilmember Gulick, Ward I  
Councilmember Owen, Ward II  
Councilmember Neese, Ward II  
Councilmember Rogers, Ward III  
Councilmember Kennedy, Ward III  
Councilmember Tidswell, Ward IV  
Councilmember Aspenlieder, Ward IV  
Councilmember Boyett, Ward V  
Councilmember Rupsis, Ward V  
Mayor William Cole

Absent/  
Excused: Councilmember Shaw, Ward I

Staff: Chris Kukulski, City Administrator  
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator  
Gina Dahl, City Attorney  
Jessica Fust, Building Official  
Wyeth Friday, Planning Director  
Andy Zoeller, Finance Director

### **Public Comment:**

No audio until 5:39 P.M.

The following constituents spoke of concerns with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):

- Amy Aguirre
- Cara Chamberlain
- Bernie Quetchenbach
- Sullivan Heabner
- Teresa Habein
- Shay Reiser
- Bill Baumann
- Katie Harrison
- Tucker Colvin
- Megan Willmore

- Carol Feeley
- Darci Colbrese
- Sonia Davis
- Tom Greenwood

## 1. Montana’s 69<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session Wrap Up

Presented by: Aimee Grmoljez, Brad Longcake, Madison Tyson and Jessica Fust, Building Official

The Council received a presentation summarizing key outcomes from Montana’s 69th Legislative Session. Highlights:

- **Impactful Legislation:**  
Several bills were noted to affect city operations, including measures related to urban renewal, tax increment financing (TIF), local control, and housing policy.
- **City Response and Strategy:**  
The City’s efforts to engage with legislators and respond to proposed legislation were reviewed. The discussion included observations on which bills passed, which stalled, and how future lobbying strategies might evolve.
- **Notable Policy Shifts:**
  - Reduced local authority in areas previously managed by municipalities.
  - Legislative focus on property tax relief and housing affordability.
  - Potential funding opportunities tied to state-level priorities.

### Council Discussion:

Councilmembers expressed concern about the increasing complexity of state legislation impacting local governance. Several members emphasized the need for stronger communication between the City and the public about these issues and the importance of proactive legislative advocacy in future sessions.

### Public Comment:

None

## 2. Urban Renewal District Legislative and Operational Modifications.

**Presented by:** Wyeth Friday, Planning Director

Katie Schreiner, CEO Downtown Billings Association; Dick Zier South Billings Urban Renewal Association (SBURA) consultant; and Heather Doty, Interim Director Billings Industrial Revitalization District (BIRD) spoke of their hopes for creating new boards.

### Purpose of Presentation:

To review recent and upcoming changes to Urban Renewal District (URD) policy and operations, including responses to 2023 legislative changes, proposed revisions to City Code, and the broader financial and planning implications for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts in Billings.

Wyeth Friday gave an overview of Senate Bill 3 and how it would affect various Urban Renewal Districts (URD). Council discussed board appointments and Council involvement.

### Background:

- The presentation opened with a historical overview of the City’s use of Urban Renewal Districts and TIF as economic development tools, especially for infrastructure improvement and blight removal.
- Wyeth noted that recent state legislation (House Bill 817) imposed additional restrictions on URD/TIF funding uses and reporting requirements.

- The city is working to align local processes with new state mandates while preserving flexibility for redevelopment and community benefit.

## **Council Discussion**

- Appointment of board members for each URD overseen by Council with bylaws adopted by each group
- City Advisory Board
- Bylaws
- Councilmembers asked clarifying questions about how “public benefit” is defined under the new rules and how the City ensures that TIF projects serve the broader community.
- There were concerns raised about whether stricter legislative constraints could hamper smaller-scale revitalization efforts, especially in older neighborhoods.
- Clarification of Eligible Projects:
- Councilmembers asked for concrete examples of projects that would and would not qualify under the new legislative guidelines. Wyeth explained that public infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, lighting, stormwater) remains eligible, but certain private business improvements may no longer be.
- Administrative Use of TIF Funds:
- Andy reiterated that administrative costs—such as staffing, consultant services, or maintenance of improvements—are more restricted under current law. The City is considering allocating general fund dollars to cover some administrative support for these districts moving forward.
- Oversight and Transparency:
- Councilmembers expressed concern about the lack of prior oversight in certain TIF projects. Staff responded by presenting proposed changes that would require all TIF applications to be reviewed by a restructured Community Development Board before advancing to Council.
- Equity Between Districts:
- There was a conversation about balancing redevelopment between core downtown areas and newer urban renewal zones. Chris Kukulski acknowledged the need for a consistent framework that applies equitably while respecting the unique goals of each district.
- Future Code Revisions:
- Legal staff previewed amendments to City Code Title 2 that will clarify the structure, purpose, and reporting responsibilities of URDs and define roles for the Community Development Board, City Council, and staff.

Staff recommended adopting a formal resolution outlining Urban Renewal District (URD) operations, including:

- A required application process for all projects requesting Tax Increment Financing (TIF) assistance.
- Scoring criteria aligned with updated statutory goals.
- Mandatory review by a newly proposed Community Development Board before Council consideration.
- Creation of Community Development Board:  
Proposed as a 7-member advisory board composed of citizens with expertise in development, finance, planning, and community engagement. The board would provide transparency and ensure applications are aligned with district objectives and legislative intent.
- Role of the Council:  
The Council would remain the final decision-making authority on all URD expenditures. Staff emphasized that the board's role is advisory only, designed to support Council in navigating increasingly complex URD and TIF guidelines. Choose representatives from SD2 and County. Meet deadline requirements.

## **Public Comment:**

The following constituents spoke of TIF funding and various ways to manage the URD's:

- Andrew Houlihan
- Danny Kramer
- Cori Thelen

- Joshua Toenyas
- Allison LaFever
- Randy Hafer
- Katie Harmon
- John Smiley
- Brad Sperry
- Lee Humphrey
- Blake Warlich
- Allen Hodges
- Kevin Nelson
- Patrick Olp
- Hillary Rothstein

**HIGHLIGHT UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS OF COUNCIL INTEREST.**

**COUNCIL DISCUSSION:**

None

**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.)**

None

**ADJOURN: 8:42 P.M.**