

CITY OF BILLINGS

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

August 18, 2025

5:30 P.M.

Council Chambers – City Hall, 316 N. 26th Street

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Bill Cole called the Work Session to order at 5:30 P.M. Councilmembers present were:

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 Boyett, Ward V
Councilmember Rupsis, Ward V
Mayor William Cole

Absent/

Excused: Councilmember Shaw, Ward I
Councilmember Aspenlieder, Ward IV

Staff:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator
Gina Dahl, City Attorney
Laura Watson, Deputy City Attorney
Wyeth Friday, Planning Director
Tina Hoeger, Code Enforcement Manager
Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

City Administrator Chris Kukulski provided an update regarding the City's utility billing cycle. He noted that the most recent billing includes all of the information Council had previously requested to ensure accuracy and transparency. He verified his own bill against the calculations and encouraged Councilmembers to do the same. Kukulski stated that staff would return to Council in September to request reinstatement of late fees and service shut-offs in the fall, allowing time to notify residents in advance of the transition.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Cole opened the public comment period for items on or not on the agenda.

- **Former Councilmember Joy** addressed concerns about housing affordability and homelessness in Billings. She shared the story of a 19-year-old resident experiencing housing instability and urged the City to explore evidence-based affordable housing solutions, emphasizing that simply increasing housing stock will not achieve affordability without specifically building affordable units.
- **Yellowstone County Commissioner Mike Waters** spoke regarding a potential State of Montana proposal to locate a mental health facility in Yellowstone County. He expressed concern about the lack of details, the strain on local public safety and health resources, and the risk of individuals being released into the community without adequate support. He asked the City Council to join the County in communicating these concerns to state officials and legislators.

No additional public comment was offered, and Mayor Cole closed the public comment period.

AGENDA ITEM #1 – Snow Removal Ordinance Amendments

Assistant City Administrator Wyeth Friday introduced proposed amendments to **BMCC 22-406 (Sidewalk Snow and Impediment Removal)** and **BMCC 15-501 (Adoption of State Sanitation Regulations)**. He introduced Deputy City Attorney Laura Watson, who will assist staff with ordinance enforcement. Friday then turned the presentation over to Code Enforcement Division Manager Tina Hoeger.

Hoeger explained that the proposed changes broaden the ordinance language from “snow and ice” to “impediments,” in order to include gravel, dirt, and other obstructions. Key revisions included:

- Clarifying clearance requirements (minimum 36 inches wide for accessibility).
- Updating language for consistency across sections.
- Changing “shall” to “may” regarding the City’s ability to assess costs to property owners.
- Adding new language to address situations where entities plow snow or debris from roadways onto sidewalks.

- Updating references in BMCC 15-501 to align with current state code.

Hoeger noted that staff intends to bring a final version back for Council action before snow season.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION – Snow Removal Ordinance Amendments

Councilmembers provided comments and feedback on the proposed ordinance revisions:

- **Councilmember Tidswell** asked about reinstating a “Snow Buddies” volunteer program. Hoeger explained that the program had existed in the past but was not sustainable due to limited volunteers, liability concerns, and required staff oversight. She suggested a reworked version could be community- or school-based.
- **Councilmember Rogers** requested clarification on enforcement for property owners versus City-owned property in Section B. Hoeger agreed to adjust language to specify City responsibility for alleys, sidewalks, or property it owns.
- **Councilmember Kennedy** expressed concern that the ordinance exempted the City from responsibility when its plows deposited snow onto sidewalks, particularly on Parkhill Drive. He suggested that the City should be subject to the same requirement as non-City entities.
- **Councilmember Boyett** noted frequent constituent complaints about snow being plowed onto sidewalks after residents had cleared them. He questioned how the ordinance would be enforced, particularly when large subdivisions were affected. Hoeger acknowledged the challenge but emphasized the need for clear standards to address recurring issues.
- **Councilmember Gulick** recommended drafting the ordinance to set clear expectations from the start, minimizing the need for repeated corrections.
- **Councilmember Neese** suggested consolidating various obstruction ordinances into a single, comprehensive code definition for “impediments,” including snow, ice, vegetation, vehicles, and garbage cans blocking sidewalks. He emphasized that sidewalk maintenance should be the landowner’s responsibility, not the tenant’s.
- **Wyeth** noted that while consolidation may be possible, some requirements (such as parking restrictions) are found in separate code sections. Cross-references could help streamline enforcement.
- **Councilmember Owen** supported developing a single definition of impediments and stressed that sidewalk obstructions, including tree canopies, should be consistently addressed.

- **Mayor Cole** advised careful consideration before requiring the City to remove snow from curbside sidewalks, noting that such a change could impact plowing practices and costs significantly. He suggested staff gather data on the number of curbside sidewalks and estimated costs before altering policy.

Hoeger reviewed current policy Ordinance for snow removal - open case, hang notice on door and check back. She agreed to incorporate the Council's feedback, clarify ordinance language, and verify consistency with state administrative rules before returning with a revised draft. Section D will stay in the ordinance.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Snow Removal Ordinance Amendments

Mayor Cole opened the floor for public comment on the proposed ordinance amendments. No members of the public came forward. The public comment period was closed.

Council continued discussion.

Hoeger – will remove Section D and work with Public Works on issues.

AGENDA ITEM #2 – Public Art Policy

Planning & Community Services staff presented the **final draft Public Art Policy** for Council review. Elyse Monat, Neighborhood Planner, outlined key revisions since the July 7, 2025 Work Session:

- **Approval process:** The City Administrator would approve projects with materials/installation costs under \$25,000; the City Council would approve projects exceeding that amount.
- **Maintenance budget:** Applicants must contribute 10% of project materials/installation costs to a City fund for maintenance and removal. A separate third-party fund is being established to provide backup for unforeseen costs.
- **Deaccessioning:** The Public Art Committee may recommend removal of artwork, but final authority rests with the City Administrator. Additional criteria were added, including requests by City Council.
- **Private property placements:** For City-owned assets placed on private property (e.g., garbage container wraps), the private owner/tenant would be solely responsible for maintenance.

Monat noted that the draft policy reflects input from Council, the Mayor, stakeholders, and local arts organizations. Staff plans to bring the policy to a regular business meeting for formal consideration.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION – Public Art Policy

- **Councilmember Rupsis** commended staff for refining the draft and asked whether the maintenance contribution would apply fairly across projects. Monat explained that basing the fee on materials and installation, rather than estimated artwork value, ensures consistency and avoids inequities between well-known and lesser-known artists.
- **Councilmember Neese** indicated anything that overrides policy should need Council approval. Mayor Cole indicated the policy should and Art Committee should be utilized.
- Melissa Henderson, Parks and Recreation Board thought there could be about a dozen public art projects per year.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Public Art Policy

Mayor Cole opened the floor for public comment on the proposed Public Art Policy.

- **Denise Joy (former Councilmember)** spoke of the value of art and artists contributing to the community.

The public comment period was closed.

UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS

Chris Kukulski highlighted several upcoming items of Council interest.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Councilmembers briefly discussed other matters of interest:

- **Councilmember Kennedy** will bring back initiative requiring newly hired Directors live within City limits. Chris Kukulski previously worked for cities that had incentive program. Could have significant effect on recruitment and retention. Kennedy wants Solid Waste analysis brought back to Council.

- **Councilmember Owen** disappointed Council is not having conversation about potential Mental Health Facility being located in City. Requested GIS map showing State owned land. Chris Kukulski very few details from State of Montana.
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PUBLIC COMMENT – Non-Agenda Items

Mayor Cole opened the floor for public comment on non-agenda items.

- **[No members of the public came forward.]** The public comment period was closed.
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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Work Session was adjourned at approximately **6:52 P.M.**