

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY
October 20, 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: Shaw, Rogers, Rupsis, Boyett, Aspenlieder, Kennedy, Owen, and Tidswell. Councilmembers absent: Gulick, Neese.

Staff present: Chris Kukulski, City Administrator; Mac Fogelson, City Engineer; Debi Meling; Public Works Director

Guests: Senator Yakawich; John Forte (RiverStone Health/Public Health Officer); Yellowstone County Commissioner Mike Waters; members of the public.

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

- City Engineer Mac provided a seasonal construction update: two-way conversion substantial completion anticipated Oct. 22; cycle-track opening pending pavement marking; multiple paving and chip-seal projects completed (King Ave W, Monad Rd, Broadwater, Pierce Pkwy, Alkali Creek, east of 24th St); South Side street reconstruction progressing with paving on 10th and work remaining on 9th; Grand Ave water replacement targeted to complete the following week; sewer project complete; stormwater projects (36th N to King, Cordova/Holiday) advancing with additional culvert work scheduled; Huson Road box culvert/waterline project aiming for Thanksgiving reopening; Safe Routes projects complete; 25th St missing sidewalk project ~two weeks from completion.
- City Administrator Kukulski updated on Animal Shelter: incinerator room cleanup completed; industrial hygiene testing results expected mid-week; DEQ to review for certificate of fitness. CM Owen announced opening of the short-term holding facility; initial use reported and appreciation expressed to Yellowstone County partners.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Doug Osborne: reflected on public safety concerns, commended STAR/Police responsiveness.
- Jim Ronquillo: thanked staff for South Side infrastructure improvements and commended participation at a recent regional economic forum; praised Councilmember Kennedy's remarks regarding Billings' business readiness.

- Paul Clark: commented on possible siting of a mental health facility; raised concerns about land/water quality in South Side, historical industrial impacts, and animal shelter site; urged further environmental review and park space in new developments.

AGENDA ITEM #1 – State Proposal for Eastern Montana Forensic Mental Health Facility

Mayor Cole summarized the State's process (HB 5 portal), proposed timeline (local applications by Nov. 10; selection by Thanksgiving 2025), and outstanding local-impact questions (capacity, length of stay, release practices, workforce, wrap-around services). Proposed sending a letter to the State acknowledging the need but declining to submit an application by Nov. 10 and requesting answers/partnership before any local siting action.

Council discussion highlighted: consensus on need for forensic capacity; reframing as a criminal-justice (fitness to proceed, pre-sentence evaluation) facility rather than general mental health; concerns about workforce impacts, siting, discharge/re-entry planning, and ensuring State partnership and funding commitments; desire for site-neutral collaboration on workforce pipelines. • Senator Yakawich noted Warm Springs improvements, projected staffing (approx. 70+ FTE across clinical/operations), and framed the project as economic development while acknowledging community concerns and the need for collaboration. • John Forte (RiverStone Health) presented a local behavioral-health gap summary, emphasizing workforce/education, pre-release coordination, step-down capacity, and payment/authorization barriers; urged a coordinated City-County request for information/partnership from DPHHS. • Commissioner Mike Waters emphasized the County's concerns about long-term operational commitments and avoiding added strain on already stressed local behavioral-health and jail systems without firm State partnership.

Public Comment:

None

Council Action/Direction: • Motion (Shaw), second (Rogers) to direct the Mayor (with staff assistance) to draft, circulate to Council, and transmit before Nov. 10, a letter to the Governor/DPHHS/Board of Investments: (1) acknowledging the statewide need for forensic capacity; (2) declining to submit a local site proposal by Nov. 10; (3) outlining key information requests and expectations for State partnership (workforce, discharge/transition planning, wrap-around services, funding/operations); and (4) inviting immediate, site-neutral collaboration on workforce development. Motion passed unanimously by Councilmembers present. 1:26

AGENDA ITEM #2 – Residency Requirements for Department Heads (Councilmember Kennedy Initiative)

- Sponsor overview: proposed policy expressing a preference/requirement for director-level employees to reside within Billings city limits, with possible waivers. • Council discussion: viewpoints included community investment benefits; recruitment/retention concerns in current labor market; possible waiver mechanics;

alternatives to mandate (incentives/preference language). City Administrator recommended caution regarding recruitment impacts and clarity on any waiver/transition provisions. • Motion to place a resolution on a future business agenda (text to be drafted by the sponsor) FAILED, 4–6 Shaw, Neese, Aspenlieder, Boyett, Rupsis, and Mayor Cole opposed

HIGHLIGHT UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS.

- Land-use items scheduled for the following week; continued work on the Capital Improvement Plan and zero-based budgeting process.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Kevin Nelson: commented on tax-increment financing expansion process and statutory public-meeting requirements; raised concerns regarding impacts to county and school districts.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:28 P.M.