

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY
November 3, 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.

Council Present:

Councilmember Shaw, Ward I
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

Staff Present:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator
Gina Dahl, City Attorney
Jeff Sprock, IT Director
Damon Combs, IT Application Manager
Andy Zoeller, Finance Director
Debi Meling, Public Works Director
Jennifer Duray, Public Works Deputy Director
Wyeth Friday, Planning Director
Gavin Wjolter, Parks and Recreation Director

Public Comment:

- Paul Clark spoke of various topics including updates on the Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter, groundwater and sewer concerns, street lighting issues on the South Side, and Western Sugar environmental concerns.
- Steve Chondra spoke of the mixed use path on 27th Street needing improvements and encouraged Council to support that portion of the CIP.

1. Codify HB231 (2025) Levy Adjustments (CM Rupsis Initiative)

CM Rupsis reviewed House Bill 231 and its impact on future mill levies, including clarification of a corrected total of 34.71 mills affected by the legislation. Discussion focused on whether future

mill authority should be allocated proportionally in a manner consistent with voter-approved levies for library, transit, and public safety purposes.

Council Discussion:

Councilmembers discussed differing interpretations of legislative intent, the relationship to the City Charter, and the balance between preserving voter intent and maintaining future budget flexibility. Debate included whether codification through ordinance or resolution would provide appropriate guidance to future councils. Council further discussed various interpretations.

Council Action:

Motion by Councilmember Rupsis to direct staff to bring back an ordinance codifying the approach to levy adjustments under HB231. Councilmember Shaw seconded.

FAILED 4-7, Owen, Neese, Rogers, Kennedy, Tidswell, Aspenlieder, Boyett opposed

Mayor missed opening the public comment period. He opened it during agenda item #2.

Public Comment:

George Richards, Firefighters State of MT Association, spoke against the bill and indicated the Legislation had not considered the City of Billings and the Charter allowances.

Public comment addressed emergency response impacts related to rail crossings, trail safety and community benefits, landfill diversion and recycling opportunities, and infrastructure priorities.

2. FY2027 Technology Replacement Plan (TRP)

Presented by Jeff Sprock, IT Director, and Damon Combs, IT Application Manager

Staff presented the FY2027 Technology Replacement Plan outlining lifecycle-based replacement of computers, servers, network infrastructure, laboratory equipment, communications systems, and public safety technology. The plan emphasizes reliability, cybersecurity, and proactive replacement prior to end-of-life failures. The FY2027 TRP totals approximately \$1.03 million, distributed across departments. Future projections show relative stability with a potential spike in FY2028 related to public safety radios and enterprise systems, which may be phased over multiple years.

Council Discussion:

Council discussed lifecycle planning, operating versus capital costs, cybersecurity risks, and coordination with future software upgrades. Emphasis was placed on smoothing large capital expenditures over multiple years.

Public Comment:

None

3. FY2027–FY2031 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Andy Zoeller, Finance Director, presented the proposed five-year Capital Improvement Plan totaling approximately \$525 million. The CIP includes capital projects exceeding \$50,000 with a useful life greater than one year and is intended to guide budgeting, rate planning, and grant coordination. Major categories include utilities, transportation, airport, transit, parks, and public safety facilities. Jennifer Duray spoke of the Landfill project and the reserves currently in place.

Council Discussion:

Council discussed project prioritization, funding sources, long-term maintenance obligations, and the importance of CIP inclusion for future grant eligibility.

- **21st Street Underpass Improvements**

Motion: remove from the CIP
Moved by CM Boyett
Seconded by CM Aspenlieder

Council continued discussion.

APPROVED 7-4, Shaw, Gulick, Neese, and Mayor Cole opposed

- **Evidence Facility Parking Lot Expansion**

Council discussion.

Motion: retain the project but change the funding source away from TIF funds.
Moved by CM Shaw
Seconded by CM Gulick

Council continued discussion on funding.

APPROVED 8-3, Neese, Kennedy and Aspenlieder opposed

- **Cottonwood Park (Phase 1)**

Motion: add the project to FY27 CIP (between 1 and 2 million dollars) using cash in lieu funds and private donations.
Moved by Mayor Cole
Seconded by CM Rupsis

Gavin Wjolter, Parks and Recreation Director, spoke of the importance of having a maintenance fund for new projects.

Council continued discussion.

Failed 3-8, Gulick, Owen, Neese, Rogers, Kennedy, Tidswell, Aspenlieder, Boyett opposed

Public Comment:

- George Richards spoke of the importance of the 21st Street Underpass improvements for emergency vehicles.
- Kristi Halderman spoke of the need for recycling and waste diversion at the Landfill.

Council continued discussion and questions on various topics in the CIP.

- **Fifth Avenue Corridor Project**

Motion: remove the project from the CIP.

Moved by CM Boyett

Seconded by CM Neese

Approved 7-4, Shaw, Gulick, Rupsis and Mayor Cole opposed

CM Rupsis requested a breakdown for Budget Committee showing utility fees increases for median home.

Mayor Cole requested staff memos be included outlining maintenance fees.

Mayor Cole reopened the public comment period.

Public Comment:

- Kristi Halderman spoke of the importance of knowing maintenance costs for trails.

Highlight Upcoming Agenda Items of Council Interest.

Public Comment:

Jennifer Strong spoke against a non-discrimination ordinance and the importance of protecting single sex spaces.

ADJOURN: 7:55 P.M.