

CITY/COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2025 at 6:00pm

	Position	01/14/2025	01/28/2025	02/11/2025	02/25/2025	03/11/2025	03/26/2025	04/08/2025	04/22/2025	05/13/2025	05/28/2025	06/10/2025	06/24/2027	07/08/2025	07/22/2025	08/12/2025	08/26/2025	09/09/2025	09/23/2025	10/14/2025	10/28/2025	11/12/2025	11/26/2025	12/09/2025	12/23/2025
Jim Ronquillo	Billings Ward I	1	A	1	1																				
Roger Gravgaard President	Billings Ward II	1	1	1	1																				
Dennie Stephenson	Billings Ward III	1	1	1	1																				
John Staley Vice President	Billings Ward IV	V	1	1	1																				
David Nordel	Billings Ward V	A	V	V	A																				
Troy Boucher	YC District 1	A	A	A	A																				
Dennis Cook	YC District 2	A	1	1	1																				
Vacant	YC District 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vacant	YC District 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Woody Woods	YC District 5	1	1	1	1																				
Alexis Bonogofsky	YC District 6	1	1	V	1																				
Morgan Tuss	YC District 7	A	A	A	A																				
Vacant	Y County Cons. District	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Scott Reiter	Ex-Officio SD2	A	A	A	A																				

Please note: "A" stands for excused absence, "1" stands for present, "V" stands for Zoom participation, "C" stands for Canceled

Call the Meeting to Order: President Gravgaard called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Introduction of Planning Board Members and Planning Department Staff

President Gravgaard called for introductions of the members of the Planning Board and staff.

Attending Staff: Wyeth Friday, Planning & Community Services Director; Anna Vickers, Planning Division Manager; Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner; Brenda Berns, Planning Clerk

1. Others in Attendance

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion

Motion made by Board member Stephenson, seconded by Board member Cook to approve the agenda as submitted. Motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Approval of Minutes: February 11, 2025

Motion

Motion by Board member Stephenson, seconded by Board member Ronquillo to approve the minutes of February 11, 2025 as submitted. Motion carried with a unanimous vote.

4. Public Comment: As required (3 minutes maximum per person). Any member of the public might be heard on any subject that is not on the agenda. The Planning Board will not take any action on these items at this time but could choose to add an item to the next meeting agenda for discussion. There were no comments from the public.

5. Disclosure of Outside (Ex-Parte) Communication – There was none.

6. Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest – There was none.

7. Old Business

- a. **Board Discussion. Motion. Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan Update** – Submitted by Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner.

Ms. Monat stated staff recommends the approval of the Billings Area Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan to the Policy Coordinating Committee, as a part of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's plan adoption process. The board was previously presented with the plan updates.

Questions

Board member Staley inquired about which entity is responsible for maintaining the trails and paths.

Ms. Monat explained that several groups are involved, but for areas along roadways, maintenance is generally handled by the City Public Works department, while the City Parks department is responsible for maintaining parks and paths.

Board member Staley also asked about the Bike Net group and its role. Ms. Monat clarified that Bike Net, now known as Billings Trail Net, is a nonprofit organization that raises funds for the trail system and contributes matching funds when grants are applied for. They also participate in trail clean-up projects but are not typically involved in the daily maintenance of bike trails and paths.

President Gravgaard asked about the availability of records regarding bicycle versus traffic accidents, particularly in the area of 32nd and Central, where there is a right-turn-only lane and wondered about the safety of “mixing zones” where a bike lane is temporarily stopped to allow motor vehicles to cross. Ms. Monat explained that the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices standardizes signage on roadways. According to the standard for the right-turn-only lane, the bike lane cannot be positioned to the right of a right-turn-only vehicle lane which causes these areas where the bike lanes and vehicle travel lanes merge.

Board member Staley expressed concerns about the crosswalk lights, particularly on Shiloh Road to Zoo Drive. He pointed out that when activated by a pedestrian, the lights only flash on one side of the roundabout. Additionally, because of the roundabout's design, drivers are unable to see the opposite side or check for pedestrians or cyclists in the crosswalk. Mr. Staley inquired whether it would be possible to install flashing lights on both sides. Ms. Monat explained that the current design has the lights flashing on just one side for safety reasons, mainly to prevent confusing drivers.

Board member Staley expressed his understanding that the Parks department is underfunded, and as a result, the current parks, trails, and paths are not being adequately maintained. Wyeth Friday clarified that projects are prioritized based on a structured process; for ongoing projects, maintenance responsibilities are clearly defined, including who is responsible and how they are compensated. Regarding existing parks, discussions are ongoing. The Parks department had proposed allocating more annual funds toward maintenance, rather than pursuing new CIP projects. However, the city council did not act on this proposal and instead began discussing the possibility of selling city park land. The Parks department is continuing with its current maintenance process and will proceed accordingly until the next fiscal cycle. Mr. Staley expressed concern that the Parks department is not receiving sufficient support and is hesitant to approve more new trails. Ms. Monat clarified that the planning document does not commit any funds to additional construction; it simply outlines what the ‘ideal’ network would look like. Mr. Friday noted that the maintenance plan provided by the Parks department has not yet been acted on and reflects areas of concern that the board also shares.

Board member Woods understands that the roundabouts were built higher and so that headlights from oncoming cars would not interfere with the vision of oncoming traffic. He asked if a lighted arrow could be added to the top of the roundabout, showing the direction of pedestrians crossing the road. Ms. Monat did not believe it was a part of the standardized MUTCD document but would investigate it.

President Gravgaard asked if there were any additional questions from the board. There were none.

Motion

Motion made by Board member Staley, seconded by Board member Woods, to approve the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan Update as read. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Board Discussion

Ms. Monat clarified the work session for City Council is March 3rd. President Gravgaard suggested a draft of safety concerns to be presented at City Council. Mr. Friday said that it would be acceptable and suggested inclusion of Mike Pigg, Parks Director.

Board member Woods mentioned bringing both issues before the Policy Coordinating Commission. Ms. Monat indicated that PCC follows the City Council meeting and both items do not need to be presented at the same meeting. The Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan and maintenance issue are not necessarily related. Mr. Friday added the overall maintenance issue is a separate item, currently being discussed and could be shared for inclusion in the Parks maintenance budget as well.

Ms. Vickers mentioned that we consistently include portions of the board's discussions in the staff report, which is then submitted to the City Council.

8. New Business – No new business

9. Other Business

Mr. Friday informed the board that, beginning in March, all future board meetings will be held in the Council Chambers on the 5th floor. If no plats are submitted for consideration at the scheduled March meetings, Planning staff will instead present informational items to the board for training and educational purposes.

- West Groundwater Study – returning spring/summer 2025
- City Park Department – review process of subdivision park proposals; cash-in-lieu

Mr. Friday stated that security will be stationed in the 1st-floor lobby to provide additional assistance to both Board and Commission members, as well as the public.

Legislature - Mr. Friday informed the board that staff is monitoring several Senate bills that could impact subdivision regulations. One bill in particular relates to county manufactured homes and may require amendments to the county's "Buildings for Lease or Rent" sections. Board member Bonogofsky asked for clarification regarding this process. Mr. Friday highlighted the manufactured home standards in terms of access, internal roads, separation between the units, parking spaces required, and guest parking spaces.

Ms. Vickers added we would like to see the same type of controls we would see in a subdivision. Typically, the struggle is outside of zoning you would not see the zoning guidelines, and this is why we've kept it within the platting act. This bill would remove it from the platting act and put it within a different review criteria; Buildings For Lease or Rent regulations to keep some of those health and safety aspects such as separation between the units and a nice access to the units. We want to ensure there is separation from arterial roads if outside of zoning, not overcontrolling but looking at a quicker process. We would need to update the Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations.

Board member Bonogofsky asked the intent of the bill. Ms. Vickers stated it is to accelerate the process. In other areas in the state, it can take as long as 18 months and we want to provide affordable housing in a more timely manner.

Mr. Friday mentioned that staff is reviewing legislation related to the regulation of exempt wells. Under the proposed law, developers would no longer be able to utilize exempt wells in the same way they do now, due to water shortages in certain parts of the state. The Billings West End has been identified as a monitoring area to assess the impact on both existing and future wells. This monitoring effort will help determine if regulatory changes are needed. This issue ties directly to the recent presentation from the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG) and is considered significant for long-term planning and development. Staff will continue to monitor the progress of this bill.

Ms. Vickers noted there are Parking issues coming forward, addressing reduction of parking and a couple concerning items; such as, commercial building with 5000 sq ft, the city could only require one parking space per 5k sq ft, assisted living community, or daycare facility. Parking reform is one thing to look at, we believe there are strides to be made there. When we're listing some of these at-risk groups such as assisted living or families at daycares, we want to be cognizant of this. Additionally, treating Miles City's needs like Billings' needs is concerning and something we'd rather see left to the local jurisdiction.

Board member Staley asked if multifamily was included. Ms. Vickers said multifamily was looked at in a different way and is part of a different, existing bill. The three we just discussed are the more complex issues being addressed.

Board member Woods asked where these issues come from. Ms. Vickers stated that the Governor's Housing Task Force has identified parking as a number one way to reduce the cost of housing. However, when the number of parking spaces is reduced to the numbers we're seeing, that is very concerning.

Board member Stephenson noted that if parking requirements are reduced, there must be an increase in public transportation options. Ms. Vickers agreed, adding that smaller communities often lack the public transportation necessary to meet that need. Mr. Friday commented that the current code does include some parking offsets, such as allowing the use of nearby parking lots with available spaces. He also noted that the Governor's Housing Task Force continues to see pushback on how to effectively increase housing development

Board member Woods expressed concerns about older and younger families being impacted by reduction of available parking spaces at facilities that are currently struggling to provide adequate parking for their residents, customers, and guests.

President Gravgaard advised Planning staff that the board is willing to assist with legislative efforts, including providing written testimony if needed. Ms. Vickers added that board comments on the Senate bills staff is tracking are welcomed and appreciated.

10. Future Agenda Items

Mr. Friday advised the board that regarding the Planning & Zoning Commission for the interim, there are no meetings yet. Updates will be provided as they become available.

ADJOURNMENT: 6:45PM

Brenda J Berns, Planning Clerk

--Draft to be approved by motion at the next scheduled meeting.