

CITY/COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2025 at 4:30pm

	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	A	1	1	1	A	1	A	A	A	-	1	1	1	1	A					
Roger Gravgaard President	Billings Ward II	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	V	-	1	1	1	1	1					
Dennie Stephenson	Billings Ward III	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1					
John Staley Vice President	Billings Ward IV	V	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	A	1	1	-	1	1	1	A	1					
David Nordel	Billings Ward V	A	V	V	A	V	A	1	V	1	1	1	1	A	-	1	1	A	1	A					
Troy Boucher	YC District 1	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	-	A	A	A	A	A					
Dennis Cook	YC District 2	A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	A					
Vacant	YC District 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vacant	YC District 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Woody Woods	YC District 5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	A	1	1	1	A	1	-	1	1	1	1	1					
Alexis Bonogofsky	YC District 6	1	1	V	1	V	1	1	1	A	1	1	V	1	-	1	1	A	1	1					
Morgan Tuss	YC District 7	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	-	A	A	A	A	A					
Scott Reiter	Ex-Officio SD2	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	1	1	A	-	1	A	A	1						

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 4:30 PM

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; Brenda Berns, Planning Clerk

1. Others in Attendance: Gordon Klasna, Executive Director of Secondary Education Billings Public Schools; Brad Archibald, Pioneer Technical

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion

Motion made by Board member Staley, seconded by Board member Stephenson to approve the agenda as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes: September 23, 2025

Motion

Motion made by Board member Stephenson, seconded by Board Member Bonogofsky to approve the September 23, 2025 meeting minutes as written. Motion passed unanimously.

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.

a. **Kevin Nelson, Billings MT** – Mr. Nelson public spoke in opposition to the proposed expansion of the Southside Billings Urban Renewal District. Concerns were raised that the expansion could divert city, county, and state funds from other projects, including parks, trails, water and sewer improvements, and local recreational initiatives. Mr. Nelson expressed the view that funding for the Southside pool project, which had previously been voted down, was being pursued through the TIF expansion, potentially using tax revenue from multiple sources. He characterized this approach as abuse of authority and suggested that the Board consider recommending denial of the expansion.

.5. Disclosure of Outside (Ex-Parte) Communication – There were no outside communications.

6. Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest – There were no conflicts of interests.

7. **Old Business** – There was no old business.

8. **New Business**

a. **South Billings Blvd Urban Renewal District Expansion: Growth Policy Conformance. Board Discussion and Action**

Wyeth Friday, PCSD Director presented an overview of the SSBURD expansion project for the Board’s discussion and recommended action.

Board members asked for clarification regarding the use of TIF funds, specifically whether tax increment revenue must be spent within the district. It was confirmed that any additional tax increment generated within the district boundary must be used for projects within the district. Staff explained that the proposed expansion of the Southside Billings Urban Area TIF District is a multi-step process required by state law. The district boundaries follow city property lines and cannot include county property, resulting in some irregular shapes. A significant portion of the proposed expansion includes the Amend Park area near South Billings Boulevard. The mechanics of a TIF were reviewed. Staff explained that the district incentivizes development by capturing the increase in property value above a base year, which is then used for improvements such as infrastructure and redevelopment of underutilized or “blighted” properties. Tax increments remain in the district for its duration and are available for development projects. At the sunset of the district, any remaining tax increment benefits the broader community. Changes in legislation over time, including exclusions for University mills, were noted.

Background

- Expansion Process
- SBBURD created in 2007
- Sunsets 2046
- SBBURD expanded in 2008 and 2021
- Currently 2,346 properties in the SBBURD
- Expansion Area is 1,597 properties
- Expansion Area has redevelopment potential and infrastructure needs
 - Parks
 - Utilities
 - Public ROW (streets, sidewalks, etc.)
 - Redevelopment

Expansion Report Findings

- The report findings clearly demonstrate the proposed Expansion Area of the SBBURD meets the statutory criteria for designation as a URD.
- Found the presence of:
 - Deteriorating infrastructure
 - unsafe structures
 - excessive vacancies
- These elements collectively contribute to conditions of blight that hinder the area's economic vitality and public welfare.
- SBBURD expansion will provide the City with tools to address these challenges through strategic reinvestment, infrastructure improvements, and community revitalization efforts.

Planning Board Conformance with 2016 Growth Policy

- Montana's Urban Renewal Law (Title 7, Chapter 15, Parts 42 and 43) requires the urban renewal district conforms to the community's growth policy.
- The Planning Board must review the proposed expansion of the SBBURD and affirm the expansion conforms to the 2016 City of Billings Growth Policy.
- Several Growth Policy Guidelines are addressed by potential development and redevelopment that may occur in the existing District and the District expansion.
- Some examples are called out here for the Board's reference:
 - Essential Investments
 - *Developed parks that provide recreation, special amenities (community gardens, dog parks, viewing areas), and active living opportunities are desirable for an attractive and healthy community*
 - *The safety of all users and the connectivity of the transportation system are important criteria to consider in roadway designs and transportation plans*
 - *Public health and safety and emergency service response are critical to the well-being of Billings' residents, businesses, and visitors*

Mr. Friday explained that the proposed expansion will follow a lengthy timeline, estimated at about 21 years from initiation to completion if begun in 2025. Reports prepared by Pioneer Technical identified a range of unsafe and deteriorating structures within the area, though not all were found to be deficient. It was noted that the Elysian School District building lies within the expansion boundary, but the school itself is not included. A public meeting and several discussions were held with community members, where concerns were expressed regarding new construction projects and confusion about funding sources and tax impacts.

Additional potential projects include the Southside Pool repairs and funding for the 21st Street railroad underpass. Mr. Friday concluded that tax increment revenue will take time to develop, requiring the City to prioritize improvements since funding will not be immediately available for all identified needs.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Yellowstone County Planning Board review the proposed District Expansion and Draft Urban Renewal Plan amendments and make a recommendation to City Council that the expansion and plan amendments are in conformance with the 2016 City of Billings Growth Policy.

Discussion

The Board discussed whether the proposed district would affect property taxes for individuals who do not live within the area. It was clarified that taxes will not increase specifically to fund the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, as existing property tax assessments already include this component. Questions were raised regarding the bond timeline, specifically whether a new bond could extend beyond the established 2046 deadline. It was explained that the 2046 date is a firm expiration point, and any new bond would need to be structured within that timeframe. Discussion also covered how schools benefit from the TIF once it sunsets, as they will receive revenue from the increased property values. The conversation included examples of completed projects that have supported public improvements, such as school safety enhancements, property acquisition for recreation, and infrastructure upgrades. Board members also discussed whether TIF districts have historically been allowed to expire or have been reestablished following completion. It was noted that while one district has sunsetted, most remain active since their creation in the late 2000s. Concerns were expressed about the City's use of TIF funds for bonding rather than direct improvements, and whether tax revenues are being fully utilized for intended projects. The Board acknowledged that bonding has enabled the City to leverage grant funds and secure favorable rates for infrastructure investments. It was confirmed that the Board's role in this matter is to determine whether the proposal aligns with the City's 2016 Growth Policy.

Motion

Motion made by Board member Stephenson, seconded by Board member Woods to approve the South Billings Blvd Urban Renewal District Expansion, Growth Policy Conformance. The motion carries unanimously.

- b. **School District #2 Enrollment Projections & Building Capacities.** Presentation and Board Discussion. Presented by Gordon Klasna, Executive Director of Secondary Education – Billings Public Schools.

Mr. Klasna addressed the Board regarding how data obtained from subdivisions informs projections for new student enrollments. He reported that current enrollment stands at 16,652 students, slightly below the projected 17,041, and noted that enrollment has remained relatively steady. He explained that when evaluating new subdivisions, assumptions are made based on the number of homes. As a result, anticipated student numbers are distributed across multiple elementary and middle schools. He noted that school boundaries are occasionally adjusted to accommodate changes in enrollment patterns.

The presentation included a discussion about **Functional Capacity versus Target Capacity**. Functional Capacity represents the maximum number of students a facility can accommodate, while Target Capacity is set lower to maintain optimal learning conditions.

The presenter also highlighted a recent demographics study that compares statistics across all schools in the district, providing a broader understanding of population trends and student distribution. He noted that college students who occasionally share high school facilities are not included in the enrollment count.

Questions

Board members raised concerns about approving new subdivisions in areas where schools are approaching or exceeding capacity. Issues discussed included the potential need to bus students, public safety with understaffed police and fire services, and road width and infrastructure challenges. Members emphasized that meeting the technical criteria for plat approval does not necessarily address these broader community impacts.

The discussion also addressed how the school district plans for growth. Representatives explained that enrollment projections are based on subdivision data, but the exact number of students per grade or school is difficult to predict. Redistricting is sometimes used to balance enrollment, and Functional Capacity versus Target Capacity is considered when planning for optimal classroom sizes. The Board discussed challenges with larger and smaller classrooms, potential impacts of demographic fluctuations and strategies such as combining classes in elementary grades to manage enrollment.

Questions were raised about potential incentives from developers, such as donating land or contributing funds for school facilities or traffic improvements. Representatives noted that while land or cash contributions may be possible under state law, logistical and regulatory challenges limit the district's ability to hold large sums or easily integrate parcels. The possibility of implementing impact fees to support schools and public safety was discussed as a potential tool for managing growth-related costs.

Board members also inquired about historical subdivision approvals, the number of lots added annually, and the projected impacts of major infrastructure projects, such as new bridges, on school districts.

9. Other Business

Anna Vickers informed the Board members of the upcoming Education Interim Budget Committee meeting on December 16, 2025, which can be attended remotely. Additional information, including participation instructions, will be provided via email.

Board members were also reminded of the City of Billings Boards and Commissions Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, scheduled for October 29th at 6:00 p.m. at the Senior Center.

10. Future Agenda Items

ADJOURNMENT: 5:54PM

Brenda J Berns, Planning Clerk