RESOLUTION 26-_____

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING
THE BILLINGS HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

WHEREAS, Title 76, Chapter 25, MCA, known as the Montana Land Use Planning Act ("MLUPA"), enacted by the Montana Legislature during the 69th Legislative Session (2025), requires cities with populations of 5,000 or more to adopt new land use plans; and

WHEREAS, Title 76, Chapter 25, Part 214, MCA allows for the City of Billings City Council to adopt area plans to provide a more localized analysis of a subarea; and

WHEREAS, the City of Billings City Council has adopted the land use plan and future land use map, *Billings 2045 Land Use Plan* on May 11, 2026, as Resolution 26-11334 and amended the Land Use Plan on July 27, 2026, as Resolution 26-_____;

WHEREAS, the *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* will be adopted as an area plan as provided for within Title 76, Chapter 25, Part 214, MCA; and

WHEREAS, *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* is designed to be a comprehensive, compelling, and accessible resource for all community members. It establishes a long-range vision for the Heights Neighborhood's future, ensuring that as Billings grows, it does so in a manner that is both strategic, and reflective of the community values expressed through this process. The plan is designed to start with a broad vision and move toward more specific implementation strategies; and

WHEREAS, MLUPA mandates ongoing public involvement in the development and adoption of land use policies, guided by a municipally adopted Public Participation Plan; and

WHEREAS, versions of the draft plan were made available for public review on billingsheightsplan.com/ and billingsmt.gov/184/CityCounty-Planning. The adoption process and draft for the *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* was publicized through newsletters, emails, and press releases requesting feedback. Additionally, public hearing details and draft documents were shared via the City of Billings website; and

WHEREAS, continuous public comment and input was provided in accordance with the City's adopted Public Participation Plan. DOWL, the consultant, and Planning

staff carried out a comprehensive outreach effort for the *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* throughout 2024, 2025, and 2026. Efforts included two open houses, one community surveys, nine stakeholder meetings, presentations to City of Billings City Council, Heights Task Force, online purchased ads on Facebook and several media interviews with KULR8, KTVQ, and the Billings Gazette; and

WHEREAS, the Interim Planning Commission held a public hearing on July 16, 2026, and considering public comment, recommends the City Council *adopt Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* to replace the *2006 Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan*; and

WHEREAS, the City Council held the final public hearing on July 27, 2026, to take public comment on the proposed plan and to consider the Interim Planning Commission's recommendation when determining whether to approve or deny a Resolution to adopt the *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan.*

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BILLINGS, MONTANA:

1. Neighborhood Plan. The *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* attached as Exhibit A and incorporated herein, are hereby adopted as Billings' new neighborhood plan to replace the *2006 Billings Heights Plan*, and also contributing to the *Billings 2045 Plan* regarding the area's neighborhood goals.

2. Notice of Hearing. On Monday, July 27, 2026, at 5:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter could be considered on the agenda in the Council Chambers at City Hall, Billings, Montana, the City Council heard objections to the adoption of this resolution adopting the *Billings Heights Neighborhood Pla*n. The City Clerk published notice in the Yellowstone County News, as provided in Section 7-1-4127, MCA.

3. Effective Date. This resolution shall be effective immediately upon adoption.

ADOPTED AND APPROVED by the City Council of the City of Billings, Montana, on the 27th day of July, 2026.

CITY OF BILLINGS

By: _____
Mike Nelson, Mayor

ATTEST:

By: _____
Denise R. Bohlman, City Clerk

EXHIBIT A

Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan

BILLINGS HEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

UPDATE
2026-2045

JULY 2026

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AADT	Average Annual Daily Traffic
ADU	Accessory Dwelling Unit
BBWA	Billings Bench Water Association
BFD	Billings Fire Department
BPAC	Billings Pedestrian Advisory Committee
BPD	Billings Police Department
BSED	Big Sky Economic Development
BUFSA	Billings Urban Fire Service Area
CIP	Capital Improvement Plan
CMU	Corridor Mixed-Use
CPTED	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
CX	Heavy Commercial (Zoning)
DEQ	Montana Department of Environmental Quality
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
FY	Fiscal Year
GIS	Geographic Information System
GRAPI	Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income
H2S	Hydrogen Sulfide
HB	House Bill
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IRC	International Residential Code
LRTP	Long-Range Transportation Plan
MDT	Montana Department of Transportation
MET	Metropolitan Transit (MET Transit)
MHMP	Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan

MLUPA	Montana Land Use Planning Act
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association
NMU	Neighborhood Mixed-Use
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
PRPL	Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
SB	Senate Bill
SRTS	Safe Routes to School
SMOCAPI	Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income
SOC	Species of Concern
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
TDP	Transit Development Plan
TIF	Tax Increment Financing
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
YRPA	Yellowstone River Parks Association

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan update is to chart a path through a period of rapid growth and significant infrastructure change. The updated plan documents existing conditions and provides the community, City of Billings, and Yellowstone County with a coordinated 20-year action plan for the future, according to the neighborhood vision:

> ***Billings Heights Neighborhood Vision Statement***
>
> *The Heights is proud to be a vibrant, family-friendly neighborhood with a small-town feel.*
>
> *The community aims to enhance quality of life with balanced residential development, safe and connected transportation systems, ample parks and community amenities, diverse economic development, and the infrastructure needed to support the neighborhood as it grows.*

Neighborhood Growth and Change

The Heights is in an ongoing period of significant population growth; the neighborhood population grew by 50% between 2000 and 2020. The neighborhood now represents one quarter of the City of Billings population. Based on current population projections, the Heights is expected to add over 10,000 residents by 2045, requiring nearly 6,500 new housing units and major reinvestments in utilities, parks, transportation infrastructure, and community facilities.

The community is also adapting to the following major changes:

- New roadway connections (Skyway Drive and the NE Billings Bypass) that reshape access and development patterns
- Statewide land use reform (Montana Code Annotated Title 76, Chapter 25 – Montana Land Use Planning Act), which requires more standardized growth strategies and expanded housing options that respond to changing demographics and household needs
- Growing interest in walkability and local economic development in the Heights, expressed consistently through public engagement

In response to these changing dynamics, existing conditions, and the community's vision, this plan sets a framework of goals and strategies to guide the growth and development of the Heights between now and the year 2045.

Public Engagement

The development of this updated plan included a variety of public engagement strategies, including surveys, stakeholder meetings, open houses, and online engagement. This process revealed community priorities, including:

- Walkability, safety, and traffic management
- Access to parks, trails, and recreation
- Balanced, intentional growth and development
- More housing choices – especially single-family, townhomes, and small-scale multifamily
- More restaurants, local businesses, and entertainment options
- Improved infrastructure, particularly stormwater, lighting, and pedestrian connectivity
- More community facilities, especially youth services and indoor recreation

Residents expressed a strong desire to maintain the neighborhood's family-friendly, small-town character, while also recognizing that more housing and services are needed to support current and future residents.

Plan Elements

This neighborhood plan is organized by topic into the following chapters. Key points from each chapter are summarized below.

1.0 Introduction

- Outlines the purpose of the plan and the update process.
- Defines the Neighborhood Plan Area and key contextual information about the Heights.
- Introduces the neighborhood vision and how this informs the goals and strategies throughout the plan.

2.0 Current Land Use

- The Heights contains approximately 4,796 acres of vacant or underutilized land that could be available for development or redevelopment. This includes land across all zoning districts in the Heights, and a mix of public and privately owned land.
- Environmental constraints such as slopes, rocky conditions, and floodplains shape where future development can occur.

3.0 Population Trends

- The Heights population has been rapidly growing, now representing roughly one-quarter of the entire City of Billings population.
- By 2045, the Heights population is projected to grow from 29,567 (in 2020) to 39,840, adding approximately 10,000 residents.

4.0 Housing

- Housing supply is not keeping pace with demand; vacancy rates in the Heights currently fall below healthy thresholds.
- The average household size is decreasing in line with national trends; in response, the neighborhood will need a greater mix of smaller unit types, including “missing middle” options.
- A housing needs analysis determined that approximately 6,482 more units could be needed by 2045 (compared to units in 2020). This would require adding an average of 259 units per year. For reference, the Heights added an average of 205 units per year between 2000 and 2020, so the pace of housing development would need to increase to keep up with continued population growth.
- The Montana Land Use Planning Act requires cities like Billings to promote housing diversity. This plan outlines zoning changes that would support compliance and meeting the neighborhood’s housing needs.

5.0 Economic Development

- The Heights has a major commercial corridor along Main Street, but it is primarily auto-oriented and lacks a defined center and diversity in business type.
- Community feedback shows broad support for:
    - Local shops, restaurants, and entertainment options
    - Revitalized Main Street aesthetics and improved safety, especially for pedestrians
    - New commercial activity mixed into more neighborhoods, to provide walkable options
- This chapter highlights opportunities such as business collaboration and focusing on existing and new major transportation corridors.

6.0 Utilities

- Pre-annexation County standards have left gaps in water, sewer, stormwater, and other infrastructure.
- Planned upgrades are needed to accommodate infill development and future neighborhood expansion.

7.0 Community Facilities

- Existing parks are a major neighborhood asset, and ongoing expansion of parks such as Castle Rock Park and John H. Dover Memorial Park will continue to improve access to community recreation, gathering, and natural open space in the future.
- Residents identified opportunities for improved or expanded community facilities and programming, especially indoor multi-purpose

facilities, youth services, and monitoring future need for more schools.

8.0 Public Safety

- The Heights generally feels safe, but concerns persist around speeding traffic, pedestrian and bicycle safety, and limited street lighting.
- Designing streets for efficient emergency vehicle access should be an area of focus, and ongoing neighborhood expansion may require additional public safety facilities including for Billings Police Department and Billings Fire Department.

9.0 Transportation

- Community engagement for this plan update showed that safety for all transportation modes is a top concern for residents.
- Heights residents emphasized issues with traffic congestion on major roads including Main Street and Wicks Lane. New roadway connections including the Billings Bypass and Skyway Drive are expected to shift some traffic.
- Investments in sidewalks, crossings, multi-use paths, and Safe Routes to School projects are important to improving non-motorized safety and access.
- MET Transit is working on plans for a Heights Transfer Center, which could help expand transit reliability and efficiency in the neighborhood.

10.0 Future Land Use

- Land use across the Heights is classified under a set of Future Land Use Designations, which are consistent with the citywide Growth Policy Update that will incorporate the Heights' desired future land use pattern. These designations suggest what zoning is appropriate in different areas and help guide how areas of the Heights may evolve in the future.
- The Future Land Use recommendations identify primary and secondary nodes in the Heights. These are identified areas for mixed-use and more compact development, which can catalyze housing development to meet the needs of the neighborhood and create walkable areas for more areas of the Heights to enjoy.

11.0 Implementation and Next Steps

- The final chapter addresses how the Heights Vision will guide implementation of this plan and discusses how the City and neighborhood residents can track progress on the plan's goals and strategies.
- The full Implementation Checklist is included in Appendix 3 to provide a framework for tracking progress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of the *Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan* would not have been possible without the collaboration and support of community members, local organizations, and dedicated stakeholders. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed their time, ideas, and expertise to help shape this vision for the future of the Heights.

Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update Steering Committee:

Lora Mattox (staff)	Transportation Planning Coordinator	Billings Yellowstone County MPO
Anna Vickers (staff)	Planning Division Manager	Billings Yellowstone County MPO
Nicole Cromwell (staff)	Zoning Coordinator	Billings Yellowstone County MPO
Elyse Monat	Transportation Planner	Billings Yellowstone County MPO
Kendra Shaw	City Council Member, Ward 1	City of Billings
Roy Neese	City Council Member, Ward 2	City of Billings
Jennifer Owen	City Council Member, Ward 2	City of Billings
Mark Morse	Yellowstone Cty. Commissioner, District 2	Yellowstone County
Monica Plecker	Public Works Director	Yellowstone County
JD Anderson	Engineer	City of Billings
Sarah Plath	Engineer	City of Billings
Jeff Roach	Aviation and Transit Director	City of Billings
Rusty Logan	Transit Manager	MET Transit
Sarah Graham	Planning and Development Coordinator	MET Transit
Zach Kirkemo	Billings District Traffic Engineer	Montana Department of Transportation
TJ Smith	Chairperson	Heights Task Force
Doug Kary	Board President	Heights Water District
Roger Gravgaard	Board Member, Ward 2	Yellowstone Cty. Planning Bd.; Heights Task Force
Cozi Wanner	Realtor	Oakland and Company
Pam Ellis	Interested Citizen, Resident	Billings Heights

City of Billings, Yellowstone County, and Participating Organizations:

Billings City Council

Mike Nelson, Mayor
Bill Cole, Former Mayor
Kendra Shaw, Ward 1 Council Member
Mark Nicholson, Ward 1 Council Member
Ed Gulick, Former Ward 1 Council Member
Denis Pitman, Ward 2 Council Member
Roy Neese, Ward 2 Council Member
Jeniffer Owen, Former Ward 2 Council Member
Bill Kennedy, Ward 3 Council Member
Amy Aguirre, Ward 3 Council Member
TJ Rogers, Former Ward 3 Council Member
Scott Aspenlieder, Ward 4 Council Member
Andrew Lindley, Ward 4 Council Member
Daniel Tidswell, Former Ward 4 Council Member
Mike Boyett, Ward 5 Council Member
Tony O'Donnell, Ward 5 Council Member
Tom Rupsis, Former Ward 5 Council Member

Yellowstone Board of County Commissioners

Mark Morse, Commissioner
Mike Waters, Commissioner
Chris White, Commissioner
John Ostlund, Former Commissioner

City Administration

Chris Kukulski – City Administrator

Planning Division

Wyeth Friday – Director
Anna Vickers – Planning Division Manager
Lora Mattox – Transportation Planning Coordinator
Nicole Cromwell – Former Zoning Coordinator
Elyse Monat – Transportation Planner
Tate Johnson – Neighborhood Planner

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Jim Ronquillo, Ward I
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Dennie Stephenson, Ward III
John Staley, Ward IV
David Nordel, Ward V
Scott Reiter, School District #2
Troy Boucher, BOCC Dist. #1
Dennis Cook, BOCC Dist. #2
Woody Woods, BOCC Dist. #5
Alexis Bonogofsky, BOCC Dist. #6
Morgan Tuss, BOCC Dist. #7

Participating Organizations

Big Sky Economic Development
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
Billings Chamber of Commerce
Billings Fire Department
Billings Parks and Public Facilities
Billings Public Works
Billings Police Department
County Water District of the Billings Heights
Heights Business Association
Heights Task Force



1.0 Introduction

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Plan

Situated in the northeast area of the City of Billings, Montana, the Heights neighborhood has experienced significant growth over the past few decades. The Rimrocks separate the Heights from the rest of Billings to the southwest and the Yellowstone River bounds the neighborhood to the east. These geographic barriers have pushed growth outward into surrounding Yellowstone County agricultural areas to the north and west. Recently completed road connections will provide improved access to this area, and are anticipated to contribute to the continued growth of the neighborhood.

With this growth comes a need to manage future development to enhance quality of life for current and future neighborhood residents. This includes accommodating the growing population with adequate housing, transportation facilities, utility infrastructure, community facilities and services, and local commercial options.

The purpose of this neighborhood plan is to guide future development patterns, City policies, and other initiatives that impact life in the Heights. Neighborhood resident concerns, values, and ideas have shaped this update of the Heights Neighborhood Plan. The plan will serve as an advisory document for the City of Billings, Yellowstone County, and other governing agencies when considering planning actions and decisions that impact the Heights. The plan also includes strategies that can be implemented by the public and private sectors to help achieve designated 20-year goals.

1.2 Planning History and Requirements

In 2003, the City of Billings and Yellowstone County adopted a Growth Policy to help plan for growth occurring in the broad Billings area. In December 2003, the Billings City Council directed the Planning and Community Services Department to identify areas for the development and implementation of neighborhood plans that could guide growth and development on a more neighborhood-specific level.

The Billings Heights neighborhood was the first neighborhood selected by City Council to prepare a plan, as it had been experiencing rapid population growth for many years. Between 1970 and the mid 1980s, around when the neighborhood was annexed into the City of Billings, the neighborhood population tripled. By the year 2000, the population was nearly 20,000, representing about 20% of the entire City of Billings population. The Heights Neighborhood Plan, completed in 2006, anticipated continued growth.

Since then, Billings has periodically updated the citywide Growth Policy to adjust for changes that have occurred and reassess the future of City development. The policy was updated in 2008 and again in 2016. In 2023, the State of Montana passed new land use legislation including the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA, also known as Montana Code Annotated Title 76, Chapter 25, or MCA 76-25), which includes standardized land use planning requirements for larger cities in Montana.

In 2025, the City began their update of the Growth Policy to comply with MLUPA. To help inform the citywide planning process, the City has initiated neighborhood plan updates, including an update to the Billings Heights plan from 2006, as well as an update for the West Billings Neighborhood Plan. The update process for the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan began in 2024.

The goal of this Heights Neighborhood Plan Update is to guide continued development of the Heights over the next 20 years. This plan will help inform the Growth Policy Update and Projected Land Use Map for the overall City of Billings and surrounding Yellowstone County areas.

1.3 Neighborhood Plan Area

Several factors are reviewed when determining planning boundaries. These factors include census data, natural boundaries, development patterns, existing plans, and planning issues related to the area. The following is a summary of factors that informed the study area for this plan.

The “Heights” name for the neighborhood comes from its location on top of the Rimrocks, also known as “the Rims.” The Rims and the Billings Logan International Airport form a barrier between downtown Billings and the Heights. The southern edge of this Heights neighborhood plan roughly follows parcel (property) boundaries along the Rims and the northern edge of the airport.

Due to the geographic barrier of the Rims, there are limited access points to the Heights from the rest of Billings. Main Street, or US Highway 87, is historically the primary road providing access to the Heights from the rest of the city and is the primary commercial corridor through the neighborhood. North of the intersection of Main Street with 6th Avenue and Bench Boulevard is considered the beginning of the Heights at the southeast corner of the planning area.

On the east side of the Heights, the Yellowstone River forms another natural barrier for the neighborhood. The eastern boundary of the plan area follows parcel boundaries along the river.

Due to the Billings Bypass project providing a new river crossing and road connection near the northeast corner of the Heights, the plan area was extended to include County land north of the road connection. The outer edge was determined by parcels that are planned to be incorporated into the new John H. Dover Memorial Park (Dover Park).

The rest of the northern edge of the plan area follows a combination of legal, natural, and roadway boundaries – capturing a combination of City and County developed areas south of Dover Road, Independent Lane, and Alexander Road / Sindelar Road. The northwestern corner of the plan area includes large undeveloped parcels within the City Limits of Annexation and some additional adjacent land with common ownership to the parcels within the Limits of Annexation.

1.4 Future Expansion Areas

Some of the land outside current City limits and within the neighborhood plan boundary has been identified as within the "Limits of Annexation," a designation that indicates areas that could be considered for eventual annexation into the city. These Limits of Annexation areas are designated based on current and expected patterns of urban development and extensions of city services.

Per the City Annexation Policy, the Limits of Annexation are categorized into three different zones as follows:

- **Zone 1 City Annexation Petition Area:** Owners of Zone 1 properties may request consideration to be annexed. The City will utilize its Five-Year Capital Improvements Plan and other departmental studies and ongoing analysis of the City's ability to provide services when considering amendments to Zone 1.

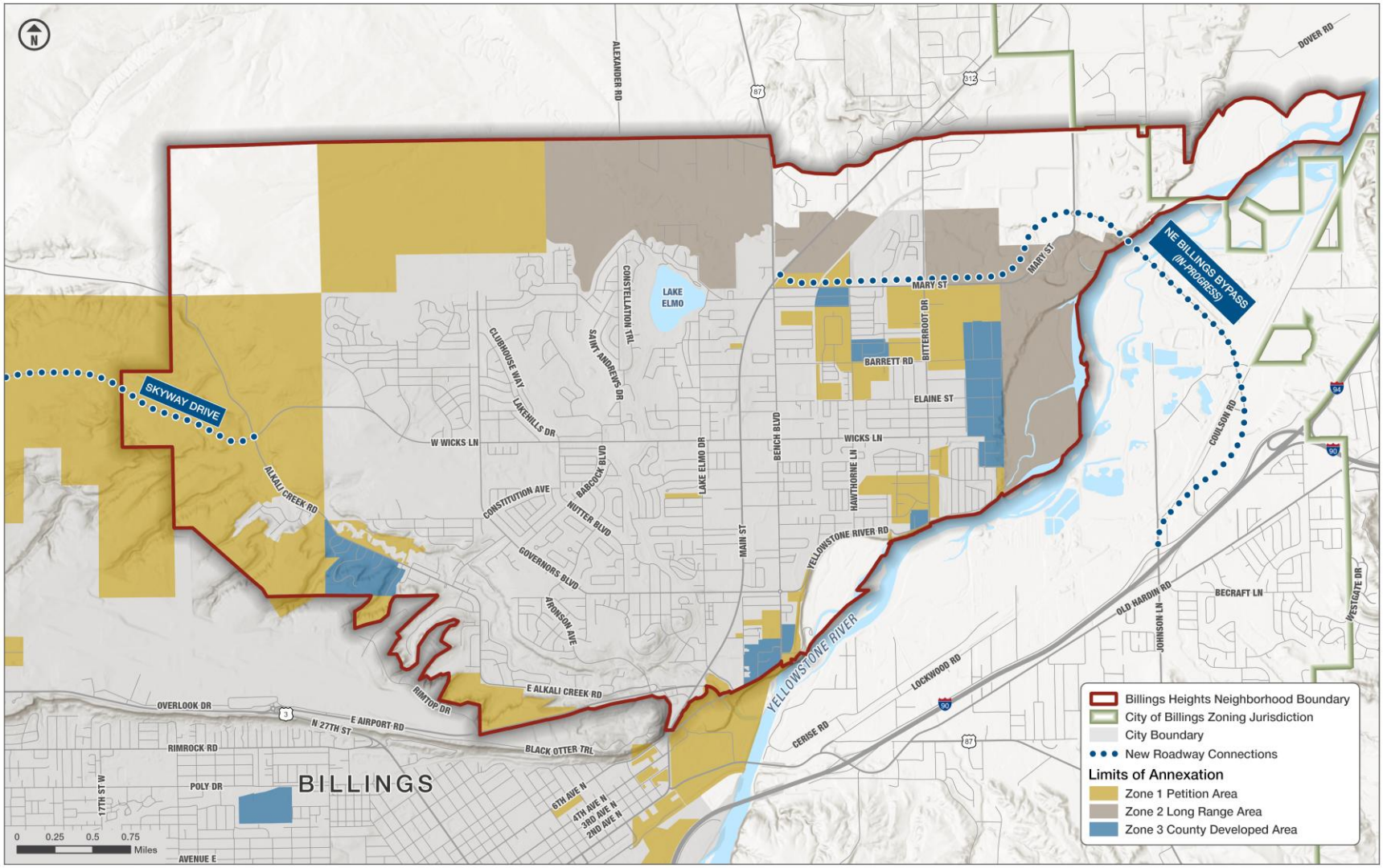
- **Zone 2 Long Range Urban Planning Area:** Annexation of these areas is anticipated to be considered farther in the future than Zone 1. This zone may be amended based on service master plans and ongoing analysis of the City's ability to provide services to these areas over time.

- **Zone 3 County Developed Area:** These properties are near city services but are not served by the City and have been developed in the County. These properties may annex over time due to environmental concerns, inability to provide on-site services, or property owner desire for urban services or redevelopment.

Though the Heights neighborhood planning area includes areas both within and outside of current City limits, the Billings Planning Division serves both the City and County and therefore provides planning continuity in these city fringe areas. The Billings Zoning Jurisdiction boundary is shown on the plan area map in addition to boundaries of the Limits of Annexation.

Given the continued growth of the Heights to the north and west, the neighborhood plan boundary was expanded in these areas to address anticipated growth. The Heights Neighborhood Plan Boundary and Limits of Annexation areas are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Heights Neighborhood Plan Boundary



1.5 Public Engagement Summary

Public engagement was a critical component of the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan update. To help outline and identify opportunities for continuous public participation throughout the development of the plan, the project team developed and implemented a Billings Heights-specific Public Participation Plan in alignment with City and MLUPA requirements.

This Public Participation Plan included the following outreach strategies:

- Engaging a steering committee to provide oversight and input to inform plan development
- Developing a website and corresponding materials to share general project information and to connect the public with opportunities to provide input (e.g. comment form, online survey, interactive map, etc.)
- Meeting with stakeholder groups to determine shared goals, gather input, and facilitate open conversations about the project
- Planning, promoting, and hosting two open houses to discuss project with members of the public
- Distributing press releases about the project and coordinating with area media to raise awareness about the project and promote public participation
- Sending periodic email updates to the project distribution list

A **Steering Committee** comprised of area residents and agency representatives offered guidance throughout the plan update process. The list of Steering Committee members is included in the Acknowledgements section of this plan.

The following meetings were conducted as part of the plan development. Meeting notes are included in Appendix 1.

- **Public Meeting No. 1** was held on September 25, 2024 at Oasis Waterpark in the Billings Heights to discuss the neighborhood plan with the public. The content shared at the meeting was also posted as a video on the project website as an alternative means to access the information. Comments and feedback were collected from the public in-person, online, and via phone and email.



- **Stakeholder meetings** with the following groups were held to discuss the Neighborhood Plan and collect comments from meeting participants. Summaries of all stakeholder meetings are included in Appendix 1.
    - **Billings Public Works:** The meeting discussion reviewed progress since the 2006 Heights Plan, noting improvements such as Safe Routes to School projects, missing sidewalk installations, and updated street-lighting requirements. Billings Public Works highlighted ongoing needs related to connectivity, congestion, drainage, and evolving discussions about Heights water service. Attendees discussed opportunities within the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), including future Heights projects and tools like the LRTP "Data Dashboard." They also recommended updating non-motorized transportation plans, exploring Skyway Drive utility planning, and using traffic-calming and corridor-coordination programs for more community-friendly improvements.
    - **Billings Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC):** The group reviewed feedback received through Plan public engagement, which included interest in improving safety, connectivity, and Main Street aesthetics, along with calls for better community facilities and expanded economic opportunities. BPAC representatives mentioned that major themes emerging from their own community outreach, included concerns about traffic congestion, walkability, mixed-use development, and preserving quality of life.
    - **Heights Business Representatives:** Participants reviewed community feedback, which emphasized the need for intentional growth, improved walkability, better traffic flow, and stronger support for small and locally owned businesses. Stakeholders also highlighted concerns about Main Street aesthetics and safety, transportation congestion, and inadequate community facilities. The idea of a TIF district was suggested to help encourage commercial development.
    - **Commercial and Economic Development Representatives:** Representatives from Big Sky Economic Development (BSED) and the Billings Chamber contributed thoughts to the neighborhood plan. Discussion focused on development patterns, community facilities, and transportation needs, along with challenges such as low Chamber membership in the Heights, lack of a walkable town center, infrastructure gaps, and slow fiber installation. The Chamber emphasized the need for opportunities to strengthen business engagement through networking events, revitalizing the Heights Business Association, and exploring potential hospitality development on Skyway Drive. BSED noted economic opportunities including a commercial node near the future bypass, activation of green-space areas, defining neighborhood identity with gateway signage, and encouraging community-building events to attract more visitors to the Heights.
    - **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Representatives:** The consultant team met with representatives from the Billings Fire and Police Departments. Participants noted increased call volumes along Main Street and Lake Elmo, ongoing issues with traffic congestion near the Metra, and challenges related to water supply, narrow streets, and a growing transient population. They also highlighted access concerns during emergencies, including limited hydrant availability and areas with

only one point of entry. Recommendations included long-term plans for an additional fire station, establishing a police sub-station in the Heights, and improving overall corridor safety and beautification to support emergency response.

- **Heights Task Force:** Task Force members emphasized the need for clearly identified commercial nodes, utility and growth recommendations, and potentially subdividing the Heights into distinct neighborhoods. Participants also highlighted long-standing transportation challenges on Main Street and gaps in local retail and services that cause residents to shop elsewhere.
- **Heights Water District:** The District discussed an ongoing study considering consolidation of services with the City, anticipated development near the future Billings Bypass, and the potential for an Urban Renewal District to fund infrastructure upgrades. Key challenges discussed included stagnant water caused by inadequate system looping, undersized water lines, and persistent low-pressure areas, particularly in Lake Hills. The District noted that high transmission line costs and system limitations have historically constrained economic development in the Heights.
- **Parks and Public Facilities:** The project consultant team met with representatives from parks, schools, and public facilities to discuss challenges and opportunities relevant to the Heights Neighborhood Plan Update. Participants highlighted traffic congestion near schools, significant gaps in pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and ongoing facility and irrigation issues at several school sites. State and city parks staff also described needs such as improved safety, better wayfinding, expanded amenities, and funding constraints that limit development and maintenance. The group identified multiple opportunities, including coordinated planning, strategic land acquisition, lighting and trail upgrades, and future community facilities to better support growth and recreation in the Heights.

- **Public Meeting No. 2** was held on April 9, 2026 at Oasis Waterpark to present a draft of the Neighborhood Plan to the public. The content shared at the meeting was also posted on the project website as an alternative means to accessing the information. Comments and feedback were collected from the public in-person and via phone and email.

The following tools were used to inform the public and solicit input.

- An **interactive website** specific to the plan update hosted maps, FAQs, links to relevant documents, details about meetings and events, meeting minutes and/or videos, project team contacts, and a forum for public comment. The web address was: www.billingsheightsplan.com.
- An **online survey** was distributed to the public early in the plan update process to collect input. The full report of information collected across 177 survey responses is included in Appendix 1.

  Some takeaways from the survey include:

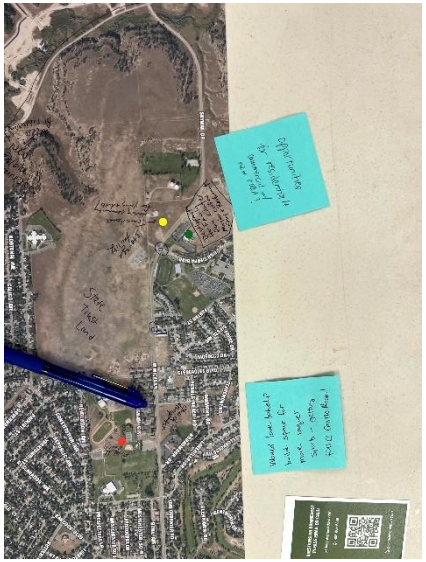
  - Walkability, safety, and access to recreation are top neighborhood priorities, with *walkable neighborhoods (85%)*, *safety (77%)*, and *access to recreation and open space (59%)* among the highest-selected characteristics.

- Residents want more diverse housing options, particularly *single-family homes (75%)*, *larger apartment buildings (40%)*, and *ADUs (39%)*, with most preferring growth *mixed into existing areas* or *around development centers*.
- Small/local businesses, large retailers, and restaurants are highly desired, with these categories receiving strong support (50–64%). Residents prefer commercial growth *on Main Street* or *in existing development centers*.
- Transportation concerns are significant, especially *safety*, *connectivity*, and *traffic congestion*. Most respondents do not use MET Transit, but those who do—or would—want *more frequent service* and a *Heights Transfer Center*.
- Residents would like to see more parks and recreation facilities including indoor facilities, swimming pools, trails, and outdoor gathering spaces, with *multi-purpose indoor facilities (61%)* and *swimming pools (53%)* topping the list.
- Many respondents feel community facilities are lacking, especially *youth services*, *senior services*, and *community centers/programming*, which see high rates of "moderately/strongly disagree" regarding adequate service.

Public comment received throughout the Neighborhood Plan development process are presented in Appendix 1.

Figure 2 is a word cloud illustrating responses received from the public when prompted to describe their vision for the Heights' future. *Note: This word cloud was generated using Microsoft Copilot.*





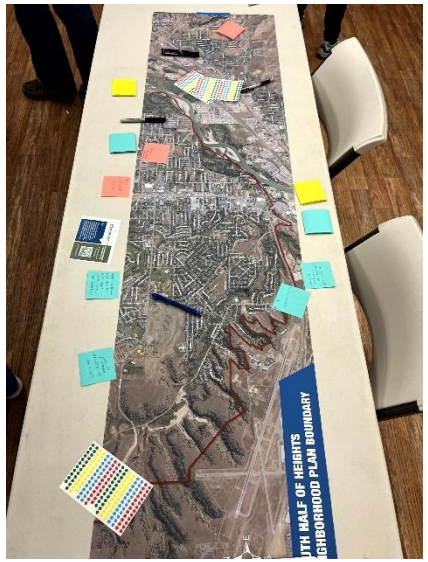


Figure 2: Community Vision Word Cloud



1.6 Changes in the Heights

Throughout public engagement for the project, residents weighed in on observed changes since the 2006 Neighborhood Plan. A summary of these noted changes is provided below.

Population Growth and Affordability: The Heights now houses about one quarter of the total population of the City of Billings (see *Section 3.1.1, Population Growth*). Increasingly and with this growth, residents are experiencing challenges with housing availability and affordability.

"Project Re:Code": The City established new zoning requirements with the purpose of adapting to current needs, encouraging development, and preserving neighborhoods. With neighborhood growth, more housing and commercial development will be needed. Along with these new zoning requirements and the upcoming Growth Policy update, this Neighborhood Plan will help shape where this development occurs.

Transportation System Developments: Several new roadway connections have recently been completed or are nearly complete in response to a growing need to improve the connectivity of the Heights as well as improve the broader Billings and Yellowstone County roadway system. These connections include Bench Boulevard, Skyway Drive, and the Billings Bypass project. These improvements are anticipated to have a significant impact on the Heights, as historically there were few options to enter and exit the neighborhood.

New Public and Community Facilities: The 2006 Neighborhood Plan noted some public and community facility deficiencies that needed to be addressed to serve the growing population. Several new public and community facilities were added to the neighborhood since the 2006 Neighborhood Plan, including Medicine Crow Middle School, High Sierra Dog Park, Dover Park, Oasis Water Park, and new healthcare facilities.

1.7 Neighborhood Vision

In a community survey, neighborhood residents were asked to share their vision for the Heights over the next 20 years. The following vision statement synthesizes the neighborhood's sense of community identity and goals for the future.

Billings Heights Neighborhood Vision Statement

The Heights is proud to be a vibrant, family-friendly neighborhood with a small-town feel.

The community aims to enhance quality of life with balanced residential development, safe and connected transportation systems, ample parks and community amenities, diverse economic development, and the infrastructure needed to support the neighborhood as it grows.

1.8 Plan Contents

This Neighborhood Plan provides an overview of Current Land Use and Population and Demographic Trends that make up the existing conditions in the neighborhood. Based on this background, the plan includes focused chapters covering aspects of the neighborhood: Housing, Economic Development, Utility Infrastructure, Community Facilities, Public Safety, Transportation, and Future Land Use. In each chapter, an overview of relevant information is summarized, based on current conditions (often shown in maps), changes that have occurred since the 2006 Neighborhood Plan, public input received during the planning process, and other sources. Based on this information, key opportunities and challenges are identified and defined.

The final section of each chapter includes a list of Goals and Strategies to help the City, neighborhood leaders, and other stakeholders prioritize actions they want to take in the future to move the neighborhood towards its goals. Progress towards these goals contributes to the neighborhood's Vision Statement as outlined above.

The plan concludes with Implementation and Next Steps to help track progress towards identified goals and strategies in the future.



2.0 CURRENT LAND USE

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2.0 CURRENT LAND USE

2.1 Environmental Conditions

2.1.1 Natural Features

The Heights is situated to the northeast of downtown Billings, bounded by natural features: the Yellowstone River to the east and the Rims to the south and west. The area to the north of the Heights is primarily agricultural land. The rolling plains, rock outcroppings, river, and adjacent open space such as at Two Moon Park and John H. Dover Memorial Park provide scenic surroundings for the Heights neighborhood.

Most of the environmental constraints impacting land in the Heights are also concentrated along the neighborhood boundaries to the west, south, and east – including steep slopes, floodways, floodplains, and wetlands as shown in Figure 3. Alkali Creek runs along the southwest edge of the Heights, and Five Mile Creek runs close to the northern edge. Lake Elmo State Park is in the Heights, which includes a 64-acre reservoir that is also used for outdoor recreation. As shown in Figure 3, various irrigation canals and drainage ditches also cut across the neighborhood, including the major Billings Bench Water Association (BBWA) Canal bisecting the neighborhood and running from south to north.

The southern part of the Heights is situated in the Alkali Creek drainage area, while the northeastern edge drains into Five Mile Creek. The central part of the Heights drains into Two Moon Park through a stormwater system. However, like the rest of Billings, all drainage ultimately flows into the Yellowstone River. Most of the floodplain adjacent to the river is used as open space or parkland, and as it is located at a lower elevation than the neighborhood at the bottom of steep slopes, river flooding may not impact the Heights. However, it has been reported that there are drainage issues and some associated flooding risk in certain areas elsewhere in the Heights. The City aims to address these concerns with stormwater management improvements; for further discussion, see *Chapter 6.0 – Utilities*.

According to the Yellowstone County USDA-NRCS Long Range Plan from 2021, the county's land ranges from gently sloping to very steep. The Yellowstone River adjacent to the Heights is at an elevation around 3,080 feet, much of the neighborhood sits around 3,200 feet, and higher portions along the Rimrocks on the southern edge of the neighborhood reach 3,500 feet of elevation. Per a summary provided in the 2021 USDA-NRCS plan, the county's soil includes sandy, loamy, and clayey textures as well as sandstone and shale uplands. Throughout the Heights, some land is difficult to develop due to the presence of sandstone outcrops. Shallow bedrock may limit development on the outskirts of town where there may not be municipal water service available due to drilling challenges and associated costs.

2.1.2 Ecosystems and Wildlife

The USDA designates the entire county as part of the Northern Rolling Plains land resource area. According to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) map data, Billings and most of central and eastern Montana are part of the Upper Missouri/Yellowstone and Upper Columbia Rivers ecosystem. There are no designated critical wildlife habitats or wilderness areas in the Billings area.

The vegetation in the Billings Heights area of Montana reflects the region's semi-arid climate and prairie ecosystem, with a mix of native and cultivated plant life. Common native species include chokecherry, showy milkweed, golden currant, fragrant sumac, and quaking aspen, which thrive in the area's dry summers and cold winters. Landscaping efforts in residential and commercial

areas often incorporate hardy perennials, drought-tolerant shrubs, and ornamental grasses suited to the local soil and climate conditions. The USDA-NRCS plan lists several local plants as species of concern (SOC), including scarlet ammannia, roundleaf water-hyssop, bractless hedge-hyssop, bush morning-glory, persistent-sepal yellowcress, and Scribner's ragwort.

Per the USDA-NRCS plan, the stretch of the Yellowstone River that runs through Yellowstone County contains over 40 aquatic species, including rainbow trout, brown trout, mountain white fish, channel catfish, and burbot, as well as Yellowstone cutthroat trout and sauger which are listed by Montana as SOC. Non-native smallmouth bass, walleye, and golden eye were added to add to sport fishing opportunities in the area. The invasive common carp and American bullfrog are also present.

While the bald eagle population has increased in the county, there are several other bird species that are designated SOC: golden eagle, great blue heron, burrowing owl, American bittern, ferruginous hawk, chestnut-collared longspur, veery, greater sage-grouse, Baird's sparrow, black tern, yellow-billed cuckoo, black-billed cuckoo, bobolink, peregrine falcon, pinyon jay, Cassin's finch, loggerhead shrike, red-headed woodpecker, Lewis' woodpecker, Clark's nutcracker, long-billed curlew, sage thrasher, green-tailed towhee, McCown's longspur, and Brewer's sparrow. According to the USFWS online map, sage grouse, a threatened species of grouse, may be present particularly on the outskirts of the Heights neighborhood.

Mammals listed as SOC include the pallid bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, spotted bat, eastern red bat, hoary bat, little brown myotis, and black-tailed prairie dog. The black-footed ferret is listed as endangered, and in recent years the Crow Indian Reservation has released them in areas to the southeast of Yellowstone County.

Other animal species listed as SOC include the spiny softshell, snapping turtle, plains hog-nosed snake, western milksnake, greater short-horned lizard, Great Plains toad, and Alberta snowfly.

2.1.3 Agriculture and Natural Resources

Land dedicated to farms and ranches makes up a significant portion of Yellowstone County, including the northern portion of the Heights. According to the USDA-NRCS plan, the ranches and farms in the county primarily produce beef, sugar beets, alfalfa, soybeans, and small grains. As Billings has grown, some agricultural land is being replaced with urban development.

There is a history of gravel mining in the area, such as in the northeast corner of the Heights. After gravel extraction operations are completed, land can be converted for other uses. The new and expanding Dover Park in the northeast corner of the Heights includes land that was previously used for gravel extraction.

Several oil refineries are in the area, including across the river in Lockwood. There are no oil refineries located within the Heights, but there are oil pipelines that cross through the area – notably the Phillips 66 pipeline that runs along the US 87 and Kiwanis Trail alignments.

2.1.4 Climate and Environmental Hazards

The Yellowstone County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP) was updated in 2019, and hazard mitigation information for the area was also updated in 2025 as part of a broader Eastern Montana Region Hazard Mitigation Plan. Though with slightly different frameworks, both plan updates assess hazards facing the county and rank their significance based on a combination of factors including the geography that could be impacted, potential magnitude or severity, and probability of each type of hazard.

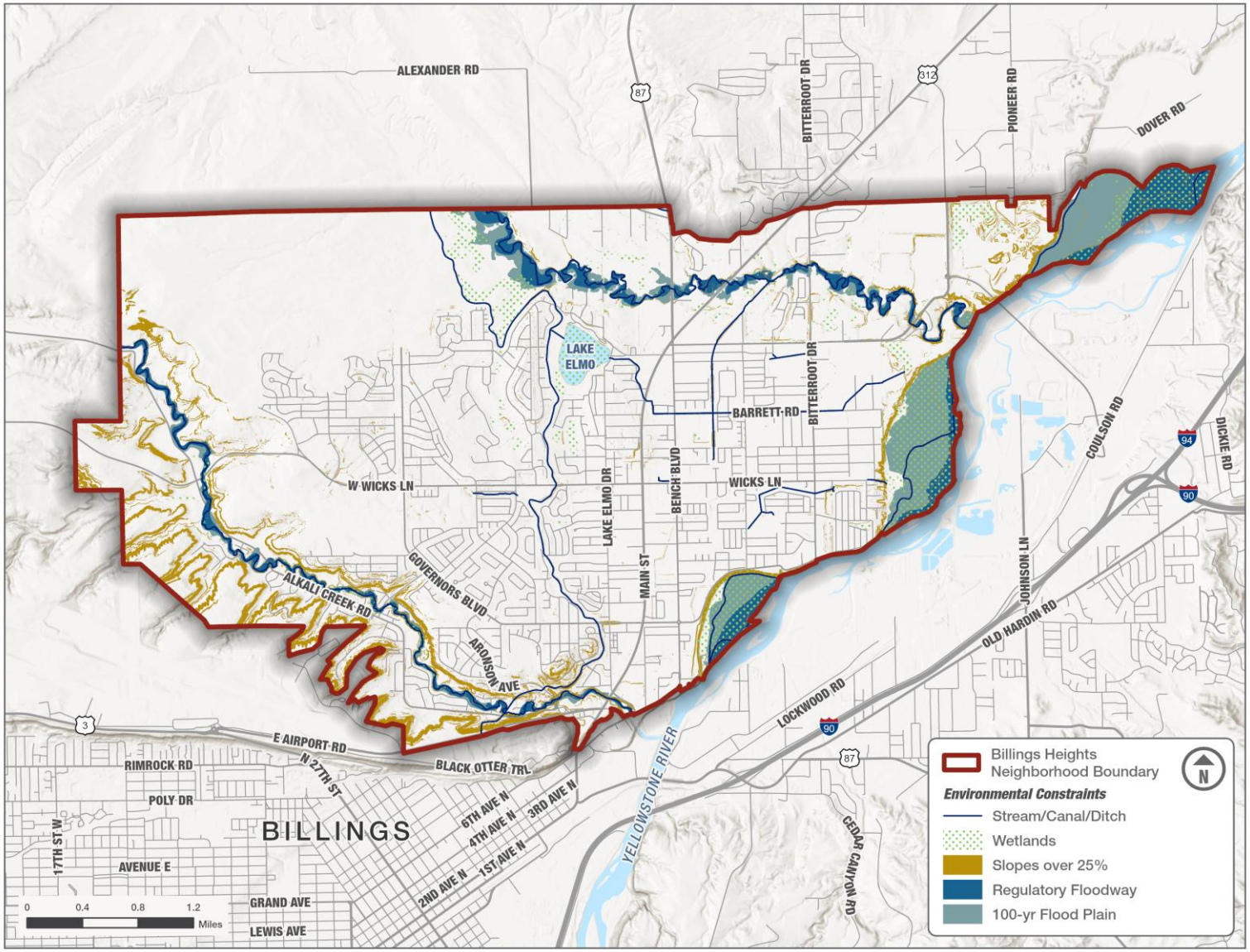
The 2019 MHMP identified the most significant hazards threatening the county as Severe Weather and Drought, Wildfire, Ditch and Drain Failure, Flooding and Dam Failure, and Landslide / Rock Fall. The 2025 update reports a less significant threat of Dam Failure and Landslide / Rock Fall, but still ranks Severe Weather (in both Summer and Winter), Drought, Wildfire, Ditch and Drain Failure, and Flooding as some of the most significant hazards to the County and Billings. The 2025 update also reports Communicable Disease, Cyber-Attack, Hazardous Materials Incident, Human Conflict, and Tornadoes and Windstorms as highly significant hazards.

Per the 2025 Eastern Montana plan, the climate is semiarid. Data from the National Weather Service for the Billings Logan International Airport (just south of the Heights, also on top of the Rimrocks) over the years 1991 to 2020 indicate a total annual precipitation of 14.31 inches, with the most precipitation typically in May and June. In July, the normal mean maximum temperature is reported at 87.3 degrees Fahrenheit over the same period, and in January the mean minimum temperature is 17.9 degrees Fahrenheit, though temperatures are known to fall below zero in winter and exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit in summer.

While typically there are few significant weather events in a year, heavy rainfall occasionally results in flash flooding. Flooding can also occur in the spring because of rapidly melting snow and ice. High winds can occur in the spring and summer. Notably, in 2010 a tornado touched down in the Heights near Lake Elmo Drive and Main Street and then moved south through the Heights neighborhood, damaging buildings including the MetraPark Arena just southeast of the Heights neighborhood boundary.

Based on Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) maps, there are no major Superfund environmental contamination cleanup areas within the Heights. There are several Petroleum Tank Substance Release sites scattered primarily along the Main Street corridor and at other current and past fuel station, automobile shop, or similar sites. These sites are tracked for cleanup progress through Montana DEQ.

Figure 3: Environmental Constraints



2.2 Development Over Time

As noted in the 2006 plan, the Heights has been rapidly developing for several decades. Figure 4 below represents each existing building in the Heights with a point, ranging from lightest (oldest buildings) to darkest (most recent buildings). This helps illustrate how the neighborhood has been spreading and growing.

Yellow points show that development began along the Main Street corridor. Most development appears to have occurred between 1961 and 2000, as shown with orange points. Any points in red or maroon were developed since 2001 – notably, while there are some pockets of new or infill development closer to Main Street and east to the river, there has been a significant expansion to the northwest, primarily in the form of single-family residential subdivisions. Additional buildings were constructed in a lower density pattern along the neighborhood periphery, in areas that are outside city limits to the north.

Figure 5 shows aerial imagery for the neighborhood, which illustrates the current extent of developed and undeveloped areas and open spaces in the Heights. Environmental constraints are also easily visualized in the aerial imagery – development will not be able to expand east towards the river or south toward the Rimrocks. Slope and soil constraints also appear to impact the western end of the neighborhood, as shown in the imagery. In general, there appears to be a large area of undeveloped land to the north of the existing developed areas. Looking back at the neighborhood boundary, the city limits of annexation include these less-developed County areas to the north in anticipation of future development potential as the neighborhood continues to grow.

Figure 4: Development Over Time

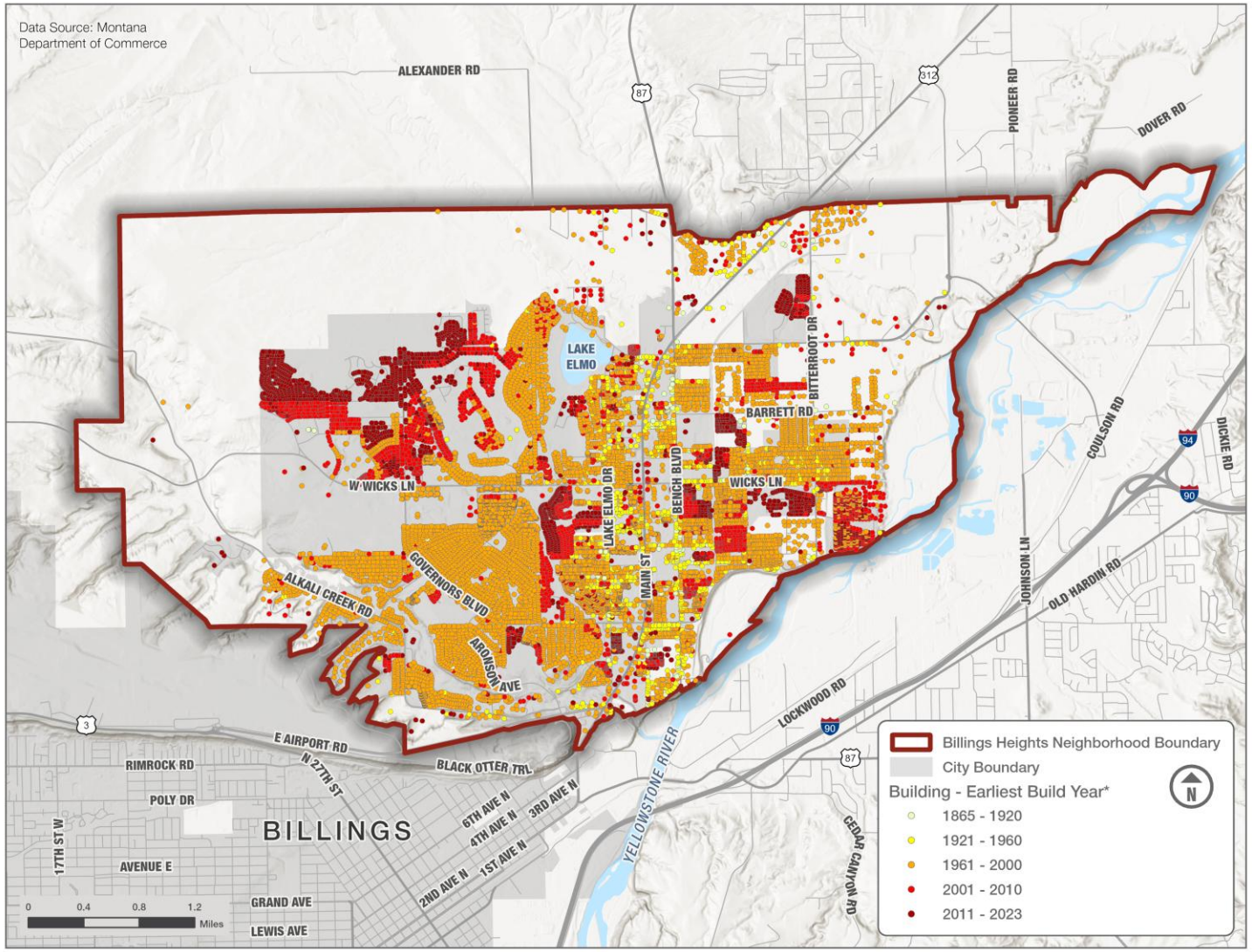
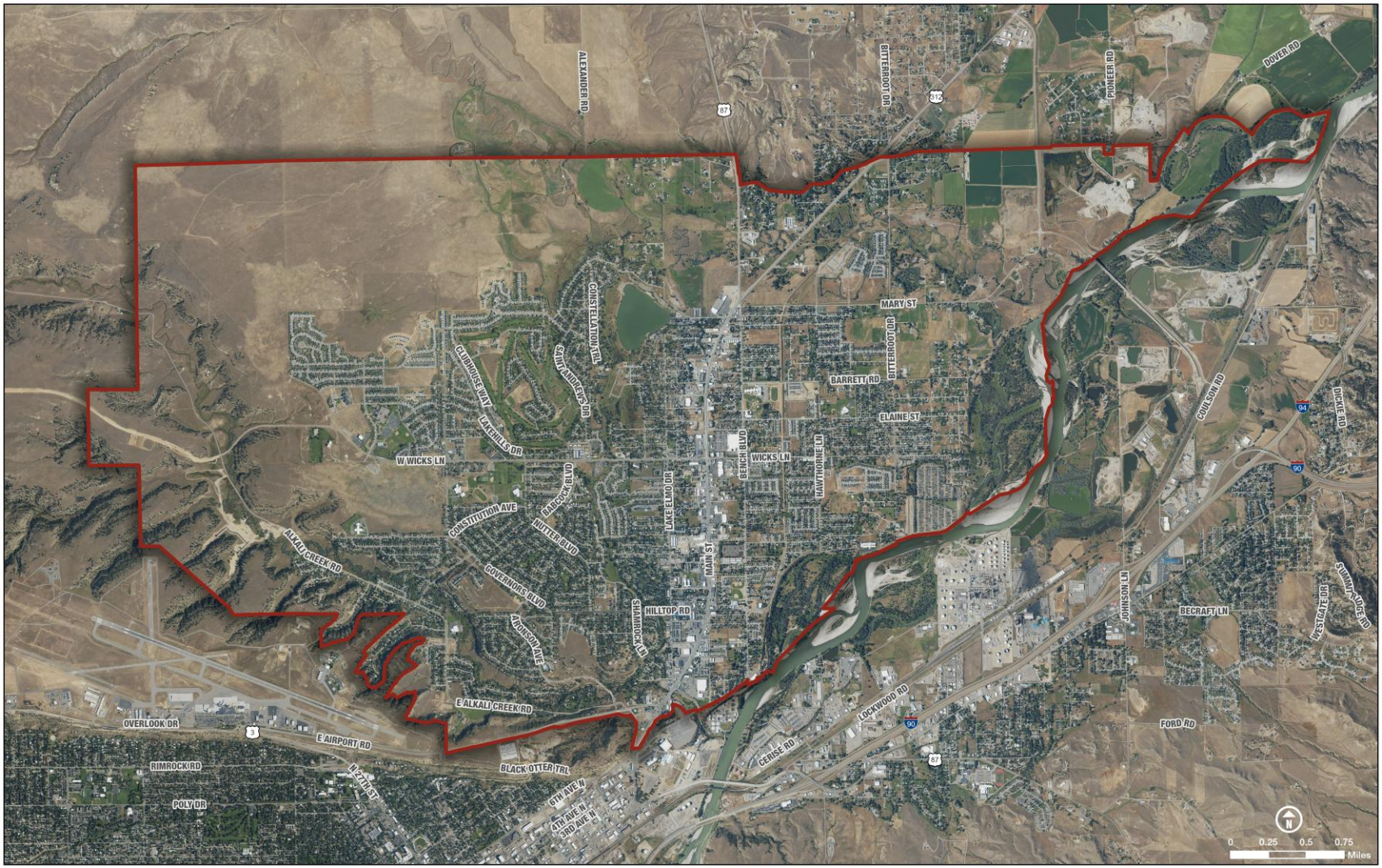


Figure 5: Aerial View of the Heights



2.3 Zoning and Ownership

The Heights includes nearly all of the different City of Billings zoning districts, and peripheral areas outside the city limits that are under Yellowstone County zoning jurisdiction. Figure 6 is a map of zoning in the Heights.

The majority of land in the Heights is zoned for residential development. Most of this residential land is currently zoned for one to two housing units per structure, with First Neighborhood (N1) and Mid-Century Neighborhood (N2) allowing smaller lot sizes and more compact development while Suburban Neighborhood (N3) has a larger minimum lot size and therefore lower density. Additional lower-density single-family residential areas are located in areas outside of the city limits under County zoning jurisdiction, including Large Lot Suburban Neighborhood (N4), Rural Residential (RR1 and RR3).

There are some areas of residential zoning that allow a greater density of housing units, including Mixed Residential 1 (NX1), Mixed Residential 2 (NX2), and Mixed Residential 3 (NX3), and Residential Manufactured Home (RMH). These are mostly located along the Heights' main commercial and mixed-use corridors.

Most commercial and mixed-use development in the Heights is concentrated around the central north-south corridor around Lake Elmo Drive, Main Street, and Bench Boulevard and along the east-west Wicks Lane corridor.

Mixed-use zones that may serve as good transitions between residential and commercial areas include Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMU), Neighborhood Office (NO), Corridor Mixed-Use (CMU1), and Corridor Mixed-Use and Commercial Centers (CMU2). These zones are still primarily concentrated along higher-intensity commercial areas such as the General Commercial (C3) and Heavy Commercial (CX) zones. There is no industrial zoning in the Heights.

Public zoning districts, including Open Space, Parks, and Recreation (P1); Public–Civic, Institutional (P2); and Public–Campuses–Medical, Civic, Educational (P3), are scattered throughout the Heights, with parks and schools mixed into neighborhoods.

Large areas of agricultural zoning are located along the periphery of the Heights outside City limits. Much of this land is within the Limits of Annexation, meaning that it is anticipated to eventually be annexed, developed, and provided with municipal services.

A map showing generalized land ownership is also included in Figure 7. Most publicly-owned land will not be available for development in the future, but large areas of private land, especially agricultural land within the Limits of Annexation, may be rezoned, subdivided, and developed in the future.

Figure 6: City and County Zoning

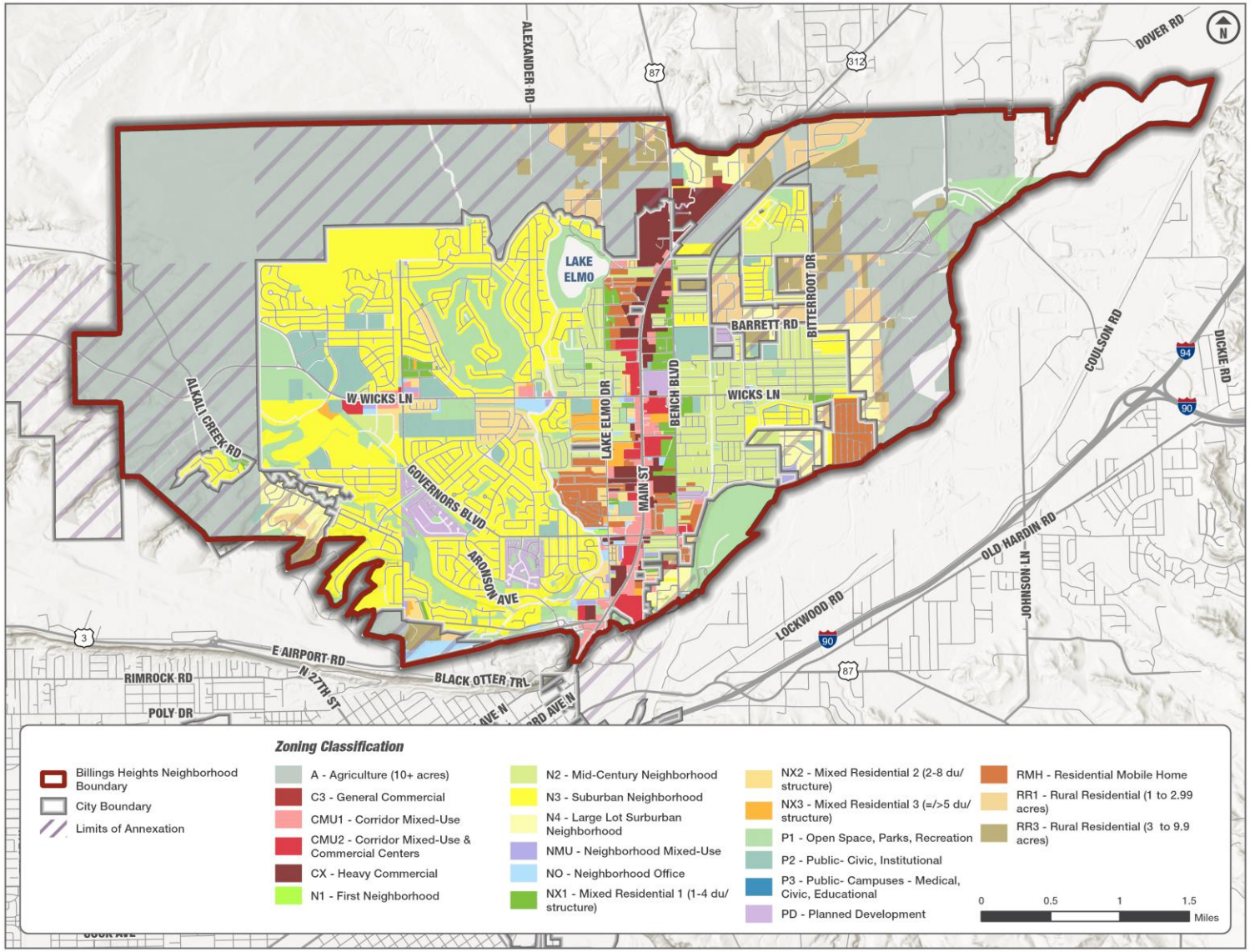
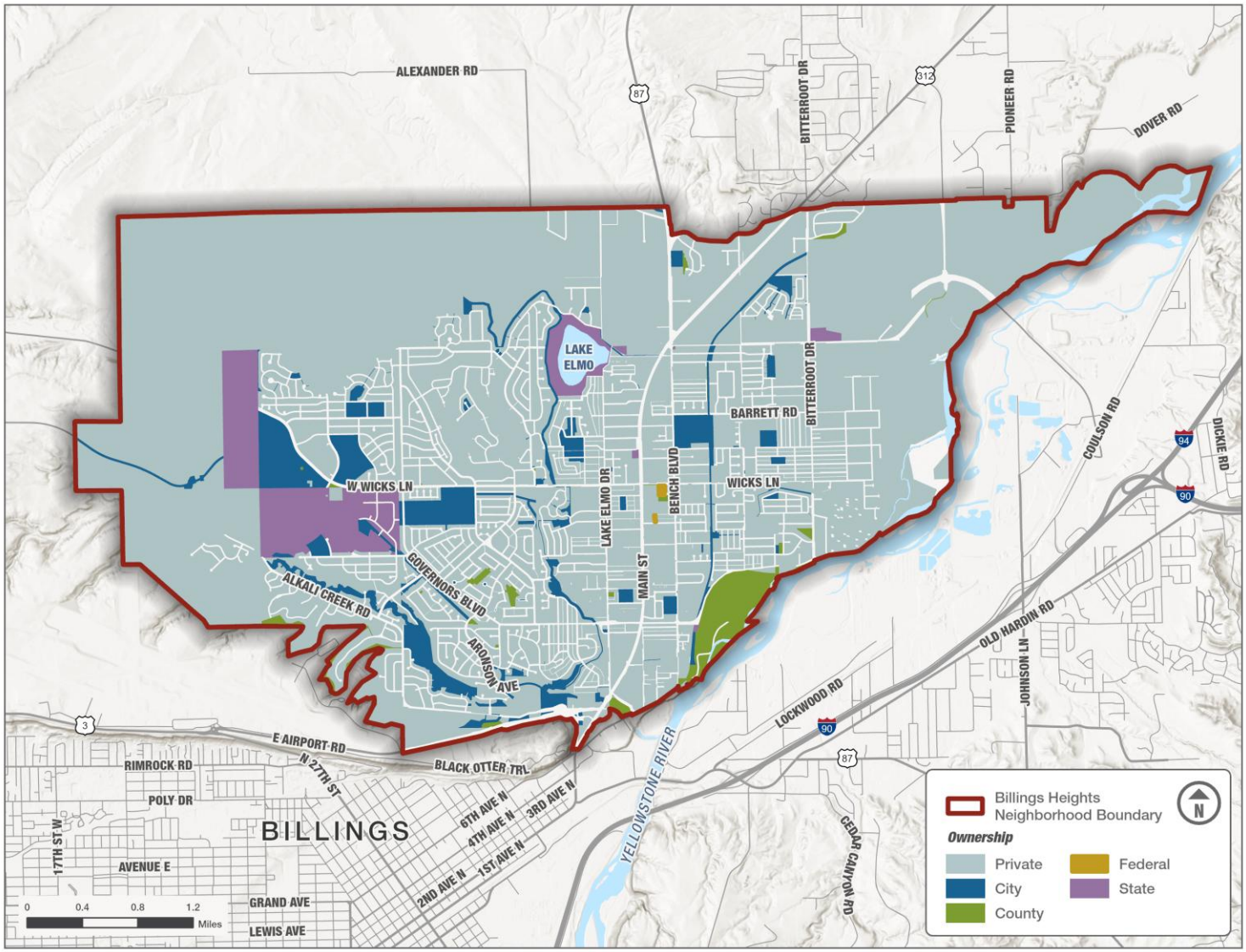


Figure 7: Generalized Land Ownership



2.4 Vacant and Underutilized Land

2.4.1 Background

To determine future capacity for residential and commercial development, an analysis was conducted to identify land that may be vacant or underutilized. This analysis used GIS data from the City of Billings and Montana Department of Commerce.

Land that is identified as vacant or underutilized is assumed to be available for potential future development. This does not necessarily mean that the land is not being used currently. It also does not guarantee that the land will be developed or redeveloped soon. However, it indicates that the right combination of surrounding development, zoning, and market conditions might encourage the property owner to develop or redevelop the vacant or underutilized land to get more value out of the land.

For example, some agricultural land around Billings may be considered vacant or underutilized due to lack of buildings. The existing agricultural use has value, but the property owner may see value in developing some of the land or selling land to a developer, like in the case of many of the residential subdivisions that have been developed on the periphery of Billings. This trend is likely to continue with growing demand for housing.

Vacant or underutilized land within developed areas of the City and County may present opportunities for infill development or redeveloping land to meet greater potential for additional residential and/or commercial development than what exists on a site currently.

The inventory of vacant and underutilized land is not an exact science, but it provides a general sense of how much land is available for potential future development, and where it is located. This information can shape strategies for the City to encourage the type of development that is desired in the future, such as through zoning and infrastructure investments.

2.4.2 Available Land Analysis

The following methodology was used to identify vacant and underutilized land within the neighborhood boundary. This land is considered potentially “available” for development.

Exclusions

Properties in public zoning districts were removed from consideration prior to the analysis. This includes Open Space, Parks, Recreation (P1), Public – Civic and Institutional (P2), and Public – Campuses – Medical, Civic, Educational (P3). Some of these properties may otherwise show as “vacant” due to a $0 building value that is due to tax-exempt status or dedicated open spaces that are not available for development. It is possible for public entities to own land that could be zoned for residential or commercial development, so properties under public ownership were not automatically excluded. City- and County-owned land was excluded, other than specific parcels that are listed for sale. Parkland that is owned by the Yellowstone River Parks Association was excluded from the analysis. The City also shared a list of select P1 and P2 properties that may be considered for disposal and therefore available for development, and these were kept in the analysis.

Some multifamily housing developments contain parcels without buildings that are not available for development because they are part of the overall development, such as shared parking or open space. To account for this, parcels that are classified as Non-Valued Property, Condominium, Townhouse, or Centrally-Assessed Non-Valued Property were removed from consideration in the analysis.

Vacant Land

After the exclusions, an analysis was run to identify vacant parcels within the neighborhood boundary. To be designated as vacant, parcels were selected based on meeting one or both of the following criteria: (1) building value of $0, and/or (2) “Property Type” listed as Vacant Land (either urban or rural).

Underutilized Land

Parcels that were already identified as vacant were removed from the analysis before identifying underutilized land within the neighborhood boundary. To be designated as underutilized, parcels were selected based on meeting one or both of the following criteria: (1) building or improvement value is less than the value of the land, and/or (2) building condition is assessed as “poor” or lower.

Other Considerations

Assessing land that may be “underutilized” is not an exact science, as different factors can influence assessed value of both buildings and land.

Mobile home parks have a unique property structure and mobile homes are subject to more rapid depreciation, so these types of properties were considered in the vacant land analysis but excluded from the underutilized land analysis.

Agricultural or low-density rural residential land within the Limits of Annexation may not have met “underutilized” criteria based on a different way of assessing land value in these areas, so they were also highlighted as it is known that additional development may expand into these areas in the future.

Environmental Constraints

It is important to note that environmental constraints including steep slopes, surface water, wetlands, and floodplains impact the suitability of available land for development. These environmental constraints were overlaid on the map of vacant and underutilized land. To preserve the natural environment and avoid natural hazards that could impact development, these lands should not be considered available for development.

Results

Figure 8 and Table 1 on the following pages show the results of the vacant and underutilized land analysis. Across the Heights neighborhood study area and across all zones, there are approximately 4,796 acres of land that may be vacant, underutilized, or rural land within the limits of annexation that could have potential for future development or redevelopment.

Notably, Agriculture, Rural Residential, and Suburban Residential zones contain the greatest areas of available land as compared to other land use categories. Because there is so much land available, these areas may be good candidates for future residential development to serve the growing neighborhood population. However, the allowed residential density on land in these zones is also the lowest of any of the zones, and they may not be served by transportation or utility infrastructure yet. *Chapter 4.0 – Housing* addresses projected housing need in the neighborhood, and how the zoning of available land may factor into city policy decisions to promote housing development in the future.

Figure 8: Vacant and Underutilized Lands

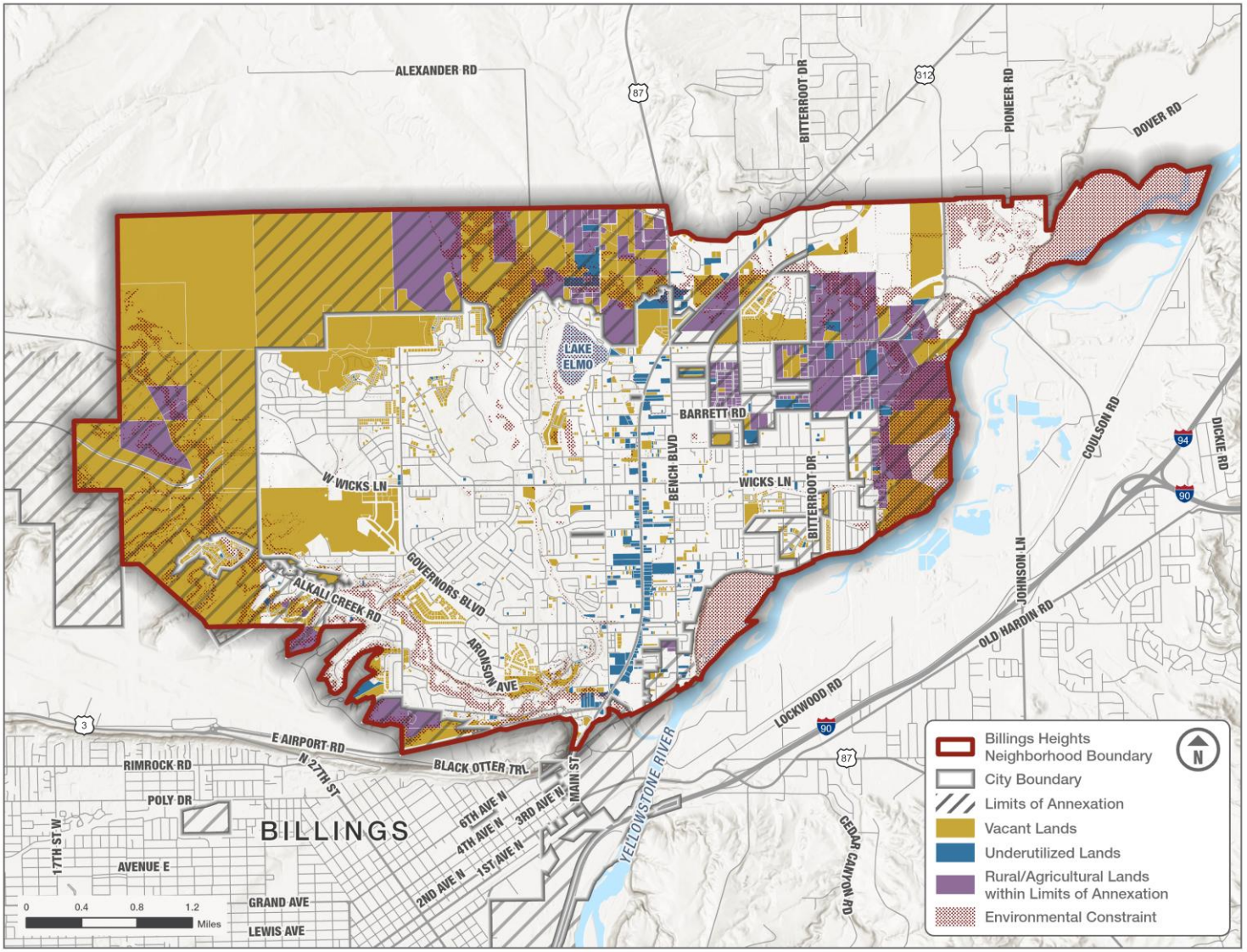


Table 1: Vacant and Underutilized Land by Generalized Zoning Category

Generalized Zoning Category	Zones	Unconstrained Vacant Land (acres)	Unconstrained Underutilized Land (acres)	Other Rural / Agricultural Land[1] (acres)	Total Available Land (acres)
Agriculture	A	2,387.0	24.7	629.0	3,040.8
Rural Residential	RR1, RR3	139.5	44.1	345.7	529.3
Suburban Residential	N3, N4 [2]	729.2	23.6	n/a	752.8
Compact 1-2 Family Development	N1, N2, RMH [3]	107.7	19.4	n/a	127.1
Mixed Residential	NX1, NX2, NX3	54.5	9.8	n/a	64.3
Neighborhood Mixed-Use	NMU, NO	35.8	2.0	n/a	37.8
Commercial and Mixed-Use Corridor	CX, C3, CMU1, CMU2 [4]	95.7	148.6	n/a	244.3
Total Across All Zones		**3,549.4**	**272.2**	**974.7**	**4,796.4**

1. Other Rural / Agricultural land that may be candidate for development or redevelopment due to its location within the Limits of Annexation but otherwise does not meet the criteria for Vacant or Underutilized.

2. Includes split-zoned properties that are a majority N3 or N4, and Planned Development zoned properties that are in a similar development context to N3 or N4.

3. Includes split-zoned properties that are a majority N1 or N2, Planned Development zoned properties that are in a similar development context to N1 or N2, and P1 and P2 properties that may be under consideration for City disposal to allow for development; assigned to this Land Use category due to surrounding development context of the included parcels.

4. Includes Planned Development zoned properties that are in a similar development context to CMU1 or CMU2.



3.0 POPULATION TRENDS

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3.0 POPULATION TRENDS

Demographic information is provided to show trends in population, age distribution, race characteristics, education attainment, and household characteristics. Data from the year 2000 is included to show change over time; this data has been provided as reported in the 2006 Neighborhood Plan. New demographic data was collected from the 2020 U.S. Census and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 5-year estimates.

Change over time can help illustrate demographic trends, but it is important to note that it is not precise due to differences in data collection between 2000 and 2020. The boundaries for census tracts, block groups, and blocks may change over time. The 2006 Neighborhood Plan also had a different neighborhood boundary than this 2025 update. For this 2025 update, data was collected for census block groups within the current neighborhood boundary as defined in this plan.

3.1 Current Population and Growth

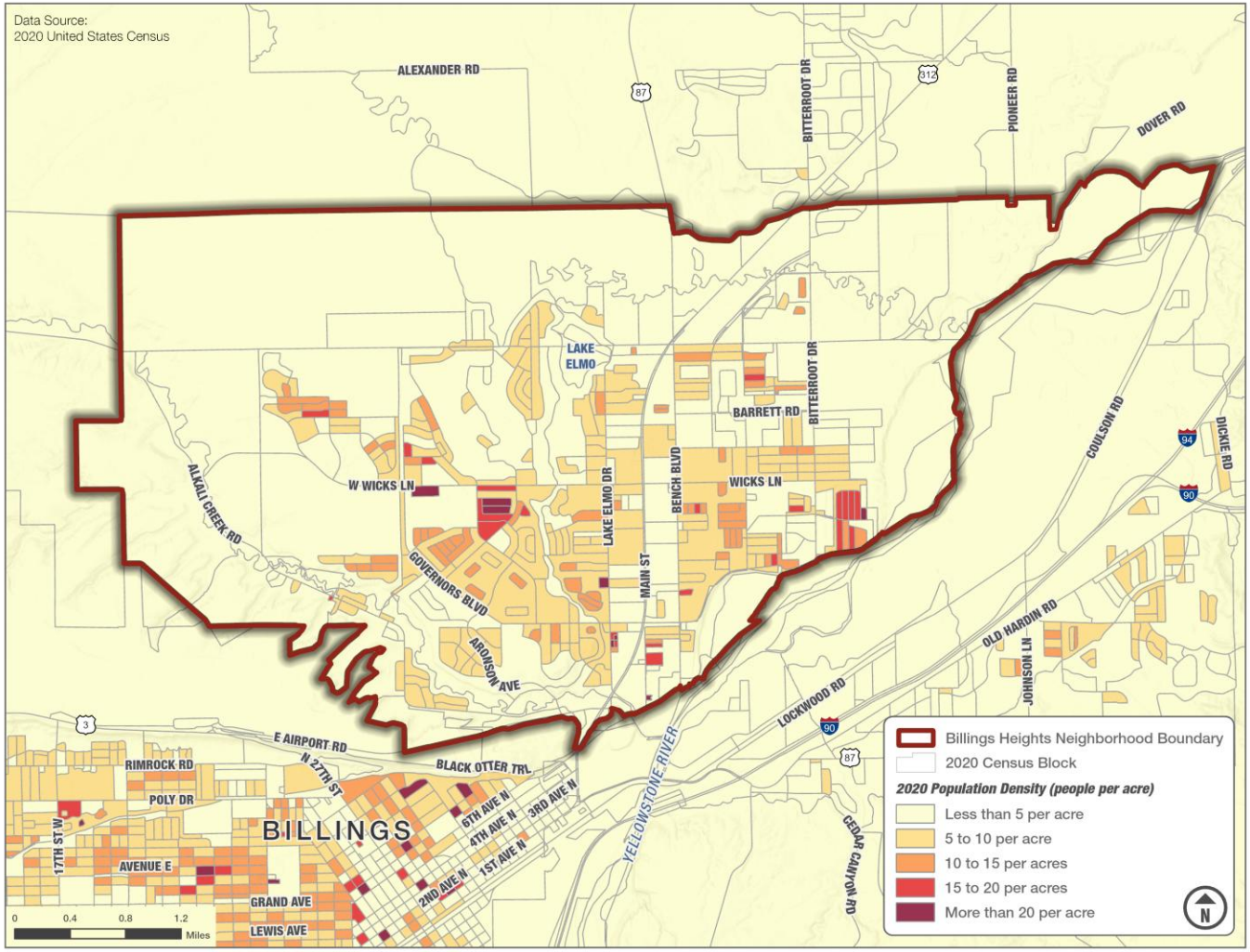
According to the 2006 plan, the Heights experienced a 29% increase in population between 1980 and 2000. Billings as a whole saw a 34.5% increase in population in the same time period. Between 2000 and 2020, the population of the Heights increased at a greater rate compared to the 20 years prior, and also at a greater rate than the overall city and county. As shown in Table 2, the population of the Heights has grown from 19,713 to 29,567 – an increase of 50%. Over the same period, the Billings population increased by 30.3%, and the overall county population increased by 27.6%. The Heights made up 15.3% of the county population in 2000, and today that portion has grown, with the Heights making up 18% of the county's population, and roughly a quarter of the City of Billings population.

Table 2: Population Growth – Billings Heights

	Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
	2000	**2020**	**2000**	**2020**	**2000**	**2020**
Population	19,713	29,567	89,847	117,116	129,097	164,731
Change	*+50.0%*		*+30.3%*		*+27.6%*	
Portion of County Population	15.3%	18.0%	69.6%	71.1%		
Portion of City Population	21.9%	25.2%				

The distribution of the population in the Heights as of the 2020 Census is as shown Figure 9 below. More densely populated areas are highlighted in darker colors on the map.

Figure 9: Population Density



3.2 Demographic Trends

3.2.1 Age Distribution

In line with national trends, the Heights population is generally aging. The median age in 2000 was approximately 35.2, which increased to 37.0 in 2022 estimates. Table 3 below shows a breakdown of age groups within the Heights population. There was a slight decrease in percentage of the population between ages 0 and 19, a greater increase in percentage of the population over 55 years old.

Table 3: Age Characteristics (2000 and 2022)

	2000		2022		Change in Portion of Population
Age*	Population	Percentage	Population*	Percentage	
Under 5	1,382	8.3%	1,903	6.4%	-1.9%
5 to 9	1,372	9.6%	2,241	7.6%	-2.0%
10 to 14	1,766	9.1%	2,224	7.5%	-1.6%
15 to 19	1,578	8.0%	1,967	6.7%	-1.3%
20 to 24	1,310	5.2%	1,634	5.5%	+0.3%
25 to 34	2,372	17.4%	4,043	13.7%	-3.7%
35 to 44	3,230	18.9%	3,940	13.3%	-5.6%
45 to 54	3,215	10.8%	3,184	10.8%	0.0%
55 to 64	1,723	6.3%	3,541	12.0%	+5.7%
65 to 74	931	4.2%	2,932	9.9%	+5.7%
75+	834	2.2%	1,958	6.6%	+4.4%
Median Age	**35.2****	-	**37.0**	-	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Population, General, Social, and Economic Characteristics

** Age categories in the 2022 ACS 5-year estimate data were more granular, but data was grouped to maintain consistency with 2000 data for comparison.*

*** The 2000 median age for the Heights was reported as 36.8 in the 2006 plan. However, the median was recalculated using the same formula used for the 2022 estimated median age.*

3.2.2 Race

As illustrated in Table 4, the Heights became slightly more racially diverse since 2000. In 2000, 94% of the population identified themselves as White, which decreased to 84.1% of the neighborhood population in 2022 estimates, with the other 15.9% identifying at least one other race.

Table 4: Racial Characteristics (2000 and 2022)

	2000		2022		Change
Race*	Population	Percentage	Population	Percentage	2000 - 2022
White alone	18,442	94%	24,874	84.1%	-9.9%
Black or African American alone	75	.03%	262	0.9%	+0.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native alone	524	2.7%	1,328	4.5%	+1.80%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander alone	146	.07%	259	0.9%	+0.8%
Other Race alone	526	2.6%	444	1.5%	-1.1%
Two or More Races	-	-	2,400	8.1%	-
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	555	2.8%	1,899	6.4%	+3.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Population, General, Social, and Economic Characteristics

** The Census Bureau adjusted race categories for survey respondents to self-identify between 2000 and 2020, so some data is not available, and some percentages reported are likely impacted by the change in race categories (notably, the addition of the "two or more races" option).*

3.2.3 Education

Table 5 shows the highest level of education completed for the Heights population that is at least 25 years old. As shown, the population generally has a higher level of education attainment compared to the neighborhood population at least 25 years old in 2000. The portion of this group that completed at least their high school diploma or equivalent increased by 5.3% between 2000 and 2022 estimates, and the portion that completed a bachelor's degree or higher also increased by 5.5% over this period.

Table 5: Education Attainment of Persons 25 Years and Older (2000 and 2022)

	2000		2022		Change
Education	**Population (age 25+)**	**Percentage**	**Population* (age 25+)**	**Percentage**	**2000 - 2022**
Less than 9th Grade	462	3.8%	136	0.8%	-3.0%
9th to 12th Grade (No Diploma)	739	6%	666	3.7%	-2.3%
High School Graduate (including GED)	3,734	30.4%	5,322	29.6%	-0.8%
Some College (No degree)	3,346	27.2%	4,388	24.4%	-2.8%
Associate's Degree	881	7.2%	1,877	10.5%	+3.3%
Bachelor's Degree	2,277	18.5%	4,021	22.4%	+3.9%
Master's, Doctorate, or Other Professional Degree (beyond Bachelor's)	866	7%	1,544	8.6%	+1.6%
Percent High School Graduates		90.2%		95.5%	+5.3%
Percent Bachelor's Degree or Higher		25.5%		31.0%	+5.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Population, General, Social, and Economic Characteristics.

** Education data is available by tracts, rather than more granular block groups, so ACS data reports significant margins of error for some data points, and the total population used in these calculations may differ from total population reported in other tables.*

3.2.4 Population Projection

As documented in the 2023 Billings Urban Area Long Range Transportation Plan, the Billings-Yellowstone Metropolitan Planning Organization is currently estimating an annual average growth rate of 1.2%, which is consistent with the growth rate of Yellowstone County from 2000 to 2020. Using an annual average growth rate of 1.2%, population projections for the Heights are shown in Table 6.

It is important to note that these numbers are only a projection, and future population may be impacted by many factors. However, these projections can be an important tool to help estimate future housing and public facilities and services needed in the neighborhood.

As shown below, the Heights population is projected to grow to 39,940 people by 2045, which is an addition of over 10,000 people between 2020 and 2045, or about 8,456 people between the 2025 and 2045 projections. This represents approximately 34.7% growth from the 2020 population as recorded in the U.S. Census.

Table 6: Population Projection – Billings Heights

Year	Population Projection
2020	29,567 *(Per U.S. Census Data by Block Groups)*
2025	31,384 *(Projected from 2020 Population)**
2030	33,313
2035	35,360
2040	37,533
2045	39,840

**** At the time of plan preparation, ACS 5-year estimates for 2025 have not yet been released. The 2025 population figure is a projection based on the annual average growth rate of 1.2%, applied to actual 2020 census data.***



4.0 HOUSING

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4.0 HOUSING

4.1 Overview

The following sections summarize current household and housing characteristics for the Heights as compared with Billings and Yellowstone County, and comparing 2000 with recent 2020 U.S. Census and ACS 2023 5-year estimates)[1]. Based on existing housing and household characteristics and population projections, this chapter highlights housing trends, future housing needs, and strategies to encourage additional housing development.

4.1.1 Existing Housing Analysis

Household Characteristics

Table 7 provides information on housing ownership and household size within the Heights, the City of Billings, and Yellowstone County.

The Heights has a greater share of owner-occupied housing than renter-occupied housing (Table 7), and existing housing is primarily detached single-family residences (Table 8). However, the proportion of households that own their home has decreased slightly over the past 20 years. This trend is the opposite seen in the city and county as a whole, where home ownership rates increased slightly. It's unclear why this trend is present, but it may be indicative of the fact that housing costs are lower overall in the Heights, making renting more feasible in this area.

As shown in Table 7, the Heights continues to have a larger average household size compared to the city and county. However, in line with national trends, the average household size in the Heights has decreased, from 2.7 to 2.51 people per household. Consistent with trends in the city, county, and nationwide, average household sizes are decreasing due to several factors including aging, declining marriage rates, and decreasing birth rates.[2]

Household sizes for owner-occupied units are similar to those in Billings and Yellowstone County, but renter household sizes are significantly larger than they are in the city or county, suggesting that renters in the Heights are likely families rather than one-to-two person households in smaller units.

Overall, average household sizes are shrinking. Smaller "missing middle" housing opportunities may better serve the needs of some of the population, including duplexes and triplexes ("plexes"), townhomes, cottages, and apartments with opportunities to rent or own these units. There could be opportunities to incorporate this additional housing diversity in locations near services while still maintaining the overall character of the Heights as a medium-density, family-oriented community.

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[1] It is important to note that the ACS data used was only available at the census-tract level, which is less granular and resulted in the exclusion of some existing housing units and households on the outskirts of the neighborhood plan boundary. This data should be considered an estimate used to identify high-level trends.

[2] Misalignment of Housing Growth and Population Trends: Cohort Size and Lagging Measurements Through Recession and Recovery. Myers, Lee, and Park

Table 7: Housing Ownership and Household Size (2000 and 2023)

	Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
	2000	2023	2000	2023	2000	2023
Occupied housing units	7,376	10,828	33,181	50,340	48,781	69,272
Owner-occupied	5,286	7,989	24,025	32,613	36,026	48,014
Renter-occupied	2,090	2,839	13,500	17,727	16,058	21,258
Homeownership rate	71.7%	73.8%	72.4%	64.8%	73.9%	69.3%
Average household size (overall)	2.70	-	2.32	-	2.43	-
Average household size of owner-occupied unit	-	2.50	-	2.49	-	2.54
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	-	2.35	-	1.92	-	1.97

Housing Unit Types and Bedrooms

As noted above, most housing units across the Heights, Billings, and Yellowstone County are single-family detached. Table 8 summarizes distribution of housing unit types and sizes (by bedroom) in the Heights as compared to the city and county. The Heights has a slightly lower share of 2-unit structures, but a higher share of 3- or 4-unit structures, a substantially lower share of 10+ unit buildings, and more mobile homes than the city or the county. The Heights has fewer studio and one-bedroom units than Billings and Yellowstone County, and a larger share of houses with four or more bedrooms. This reflects the larger, family-oriented housing currently available in the Heights, as well as the neighborhood's lower density and lack of multifamily housing.

Table 8: Housing Unit Types (2023)

		Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
		Units	Percentage	Units	Percentage	Units	Percentage
	Total housing units	*11,391*		*53,537*		*73,363*	
Building/Unit Types	1-unit, detached	7,249	63.6%	33,788	63.1%	48,075	65.5%
	1-unit, attached	878	7.7%	3,744	7.0%	4,178	5.7%
	2 units	306	2.7%	1,895	3.5%	2,133	2.9%
	3 or 4 units	818	7.2%	3,205	6.0%	3,399	4.6%
	5 to 9 units	535	4.7%	2,198	4.1%	2,575	3.5%
	10+ units	246	2.2%	5,509	10.3%	5,637	6.60%
	Mobile home	1,340	11.8%	3,168	5.9%	7,267	9.9%
	Boat, RV, van, etc.	19	0.2%	30	0.1%	99	0.1%
Bedrooms	No bedrooms	19	0.2%	1,040	1.9%	1,371	1.90%
	1 bedroom	636	5.6%	5,864	11.0%	6,696	9.10%
	2 bedrooms	2,859	25.1%	13,591	25.4%	16,875	23.00%
	3 bedrooms	3,597	31.6%	16,740	31.3%	24,750	33.70%
	4 bedrooms	2,747	24.1%	10,635	19.9%	15,072	20.50%
	5 or more bedrooms	1,533	13.5%	5,667	10.6%	8,599	11.70%

Occupancy

Vacancy rate of housing in the Heights has increased by 1.4% from 2000 to 2023 estimates. Vacancy rates also increased in the city and county; this reflects an overall increasing supply of housing in the area.

However, Table 9 shows that the Heights continues to have lower vacancy rates as compared to the city and county, which could indicate stronger overall demand for housing in this area due to the rapid neighborhood population growth, and housing production may not be keeping up at the same rate.

According to Chase Bank, a vacancy rate between 5 and 10% is considered healthy, implying a balance between supply and demand.[3] Vacancy rates below 5% indicate there is a shortage of housing. While housing vacancy rates in the city and county are within the "healthy" range, the Heights vacancy rate of 4.9% is just below the 5% threshold. A shortage of housing typically puts upward pressure on housing costs, but it also creates an environment that encourages market-rate developers to build more housing, so it will be important to encourage additional housing development that can meet the needs of the growing Heights population.

Table 9: Housing Occupancy (2000 and 2023)

	Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
	2000	2023	2000	2023	2000	2023
Housing Units	7,646	11,391	39,293	53,537	54,563	73,363
Vacant Units	270	563	1,768	3,197	2,479	4,091
Vacancy Rate	3.5%	4.9%	4.5%	6.0%	4.5%	5.60%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics

[3] *Chase Bank. Vacancy rate in real state: What is it and how does it work? Accessed March 19, 2025. Available at: https://www.chase.com/personal/mortgage/education/finding-a-home/vacancy-rate*

Housing Age and Value

The Heights housing stock is newer than that of the city or county overall, as measured by the percentage of units built in 1970 or later (Table 10). Approximately 87.8% of units in the Heights have been built since 1970, as compared to only 65% and 65.9% in the city and county, respectively. New developments include a range of housing types, including low density subdivisions like single-family homes around High Sierra Boulevard and the St. John's United WyndStone Senior Living development; these are two examples of recent housing development in the northwest portion of the neighborhood (see *Chapter 2.0 – Current Land Use*; *Figure 4: Development Over Time*).

As shown in Table 11, median home values in the Heights are similar or moderately less than for Billings or Yellowstone County. As of 2023 estimates from ACS, the Heights had a slightly larger share of homes that are valued at $200,000 or less as compared to Billings or Yellowstone County, likely reflecting the higher proportion of mobile and manufactured homes and a lesser share of homes valued at $500,000-$999,999.

It is important to note that home values and sales prices have continued to rise in alignment with national trends. The Billings Association of Realtors Market Review in June 2026 indicates the median sales price in Billings to be $385,000.[4] Recent costs on Realtor.com have indicated median home price in the Heights as $395,860, which is slightly higher than citywide but at a lower cost per square foot.[5]

As the available land already served by infrastructure continues to be developed, and as the population continues to grow, the price of land and homes in the Heights may surpass that of the city and county. Future increases in home prices could be moderated to some degree if the diversity of unit types increases. If available land has density-supportive zoning, and if zoning code continues to change to support more density, developers may be able to provide a greater number of smaller units, at a lower price range than traditional detached single-family homes that make up most of the neighborhood.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development defines "affordable housing" as when the total cost of housing and utilities is no more than 30% or less of the household's gross income.[6] Table 12 shows that the Heights, Billings, and Yellowstone County all have approximately the same ratio of homes that are affordable to the households that live in them. For owner-occupied homes that have a mortgage, about 75% are considered affordable and 25% are not. For owner-occupied homes without a mortgage, about 90% are affordable and 10% are not. Rental units in the three geographies are much less affordable for the residents living in these units, with about 50% affordable and 50% unaffordable. There is room to improve the affordability of both owner- and renter-occupied housing in the Heights by including a wider range of housing types such as plexes, townhouses, and apartments. Development of more affordable housing is especially important for renters given the high proportion that are cost-burdened by rent across the county.

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[4] Billings Association of Realtors Market Review Dashboard. Accessed July 8, 2026. Available at: https://dashboards.domusanalytics.com/v/BillingsReview

[5] Realtor.com housing & rental market overview. Accessed July 8, 2026. Available at: https://www.realtor.com/local/market/montana/billings/billings-heights

[6] Glossary of HUD Terms

Table 10: Housing Age (2023)

	Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
	Units	Percentage	Units	Percentage	Units	Percentage
Total housing units	11,391	-	53,537	-	73,363	-
Built 1970 or later	9,998	87.8%	34,816	65.0%	50,547	68.9%
Built 1969 or earlier	1,393	12.2%	18,721	35.0%	22,816	31.1%

Table 11: Owner-Occupied Housing Value (2023)

	Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
	Estimate	Percentage	Estimate	Percentage	Estimate	Percentage
Owner-occupied units	7,989	-	32,613	-	48,014	-
Less than $100,000	694	9%	2,144	7%	4,339	9%
$100,000-$199,999	852	11%	3342	10%	4,788	10%
$200,000 to $299.000	2,430	30%	9,832	30%	12,925	27%
$300,000 to $499,999	3,242	41%	13,429	41%	18,285	38%
$500,000 to $999,999	711	9%	3,456	11%	6,809	14%
$1,000,000 or more	60	1%	410	1%	868	2%
Median (dollars)	$300,214*		$311,800*		$317,600*	

**Note: Data in Table 11 is based on ACS 5-year estimates from 2023. Home prices have continued to increase since that time. More recent estimates for the Heights and the city as a whole are discussed on the previous page. The Billings Association of Realtors Market Review in June 2026 indicates the median sales price in Billings to be $385,000. Recent costs on Realtor.com have indicated median home price in the Heights as $395,860 (year to date as of June 2026), slightly higher than citywide but at a lower cost per square foot.*

Table 12: Housing Mortgage and Rent Affordability Detail (2023)

	Billings Heights		City of Billings		Yellowstone County	
	Households	Percentage	Households	Percentage	Households	Percentage
Selected monthly owner costs as a percentage of household income (SMOCAPI)						
Owned units with mortgage*	5,186	-	19,679	-	28,042	-
- Spend less than 30%	3,864	75%	15,171	77%	21,429	76%
- Spend 30% or more	1,322	25%	4,508	23%	6,613	24%
Owned units without mortgage*	2,794	-	12,879	-	19,855	-
- Spend less than 30%	2,528	90%	11,432	89%	17,438	88%
- Spend 30% or more	266	10%	1,447	11%	2,417	12%
Gross rent as a percentage of household income (GRAPI)						
Rental Units	2,781	-	17,304	-	20,436	-
- Spend less than 30%	1,415	51%	8,946	52%	10,778	53%
- Spend 30% or more	1,366	49%	8,358	48%	9,658	47%

** Excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed.*

4.1.2 Housing Needs Analysis

Based on the population projection in Section 3.3 and key household and housing characteristics outlined in Section 4.1.1, it is anticipated that approximately 6,482 units could be needed in the Heights neighborhood by 2045 to keep up with current trends, which is an average of 259 units per year between 2020 and 2045.

For reference, the Heights added an average of 205 units per year between 2000 and 2020, so the pace of housing development would need to increase to keep up with continued population growth.

Table 13: Heights Housing Needs Projection

	2000	2023*	2045 Projection	Notes
Population	19,713	29,567 *(2020)**	39,840	See Section 3.3 for more information regarding this projection.
Average Household Size	2.7	Approximately 2.46	Assume 2.3	An average household size of 2.3 is roughly equal to today's City of Billings average household size. The averages here include both owner and renter households.
Vacancy Rate	3.5%	4.9%	Aim for 5%	As stated in Section 4.1.1, a vacancy rate between 5 and 10% is considered healthy, implying balanced supply and demand.[7]
Existing Housing Units	7,646	11,751 *(2020)**	-	Added an estimated 4,105 units, averaging 205 units per year.
Projected Housing Units Needed	-	-	18,233 *(Total)* Add 6,482 units, or 259 per year	Based on the estimated household size and population, there will be around 17,321 households in the Heights in 2045. Assuming a healthy 5% vacancy rate, a total of 18,233 units could be needed, which is 6,482 more units than existed in 2020, or an average of 259 units needed per year.

** Numbers in this column are estimates from the 2020 to 2023 range, depending on data availability as noted throughout Chapters 3.0 – Population Trends and Chapter 4.0 – Housing. The population and number of units are based on 2020 census data at the block group level, and the remainder of the data in this column is based on 2023 ACS 5-year estimates.*

[7] *Chase Bank. Vacancy rate in real estate: What is it and how does it work? Accessed March 19, 2025. Available at: https://www.chase.com/personal/mortgage/education/finding-a-home/vacancy-rate*

4.1.3 Current Housing Capacity of Available Land

Alongside the projection of future housing needs (Section 4.1.2), it is important to estimate current residential development capacity of the Heights, as this can inform the community whether a future housing shortage is anticipated. With this information, the City can assess if policy or other changes are needed to get ahead of future housing challenges and provide for the needs of the growing population. The neighborhood's housing capacity is informed by available land (vacant or underutilized), as determined in Section 2.4.2. Across all zoning districts, the Heights has approximately 4,796 acres of land available for development or redevelopment. City zoning code, development restrictions, infrastructure needs, and other market factors impact the quantity of housing units that may be possible to develop on the available land. Based on a combination of code standards and input from City planning staff, minimum and maximum housing density assumptions were assigned for each zoning district.

After applying these assumptions, the housing capacity (or yield) can be estimated in minimum and maximum scenarios. The minimum capacity represents the minimum number of housing units that could be developed (per acre), such as zero in commercial areas where the primary use is likely commercial and not residential. The maximum represents a combination of code restrictions, other factors, and City input to determine a reasonable maximum housing capacity. As shown in Table 14 below, available land within the Heights is expected to yield 2,444 housing units at a minimum, which would not meet the 2045 projected need of 6,482 units. If housing development is maximized across the available land, an estimated 15,520 units could be developed. Most likely development capacity under "status quo" market conditions would be somewhere in between. Based on this analysis, it is possible for the Heights to meet its future housing need, but it will require a strategic approach to maximize development capacity, as discussed in Sections 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 below.

Table 14: Current Estimated Housing Capacity of Available Land

Generalized Zoning Category	Zones	Minimum Housing Capacity (Units)*	Maximum Housing Capacity (Units)*
Agriculture	A	3	182
Rural Residential	RR1, RR3	66	202
Suburban Residential	N3, N4 [2]	1,279	5,152
Compact 1-2 Family Development	N1, N2, RMH [3]	612	2,302
Mixed Residential	NX1, NX2, NX3	484	1,275
Neighborhood Mixed-Use	NMU, NO	0	519
Commercial and Mixed-Use Corridor	CX, C3, CMU1, CMU2 [4]	0	5,888
Total Across All Zones		**2,444**	**15,520**

4.1.4 Planning Implications

In the community engagement survey completed for this project, respondents were asked what types of housing they feel are most needed in the Heights. Over 75% of respondents felt the neighborhood needs more single-family homes. Approximately 40% would like to see more townhome development, and about 25% of respondents felt more condominiums and small multifamily buildings (two to four units) are needed. There appears to be a preference for single-family homes and other housing types that may offer ownership opportunities, as opposed to larger multifamily development. Some residents expressed a desire to maintain the existing low-density character of the Heights, with concerns about how new higher-density housing might affect traffic, capacity of public facilities and services, open space, and the overall character of the neighborhood. Comments reflected a cautious approach to residential growth. However, most residents agreed that more housing is needed.

The tables above demonstrate that Billings Heights is experiencing similar housing challenges present throughout the country, with an increase in demand and evolution of housing needs. Billings Heights has a low vacancy rate and is experiencing a shortage of available housing, which will exacerbate unaffordability. Decreasing affordability can result in displacement, and the supply and creation of affordable housing options should be prioritized. The Heights has opportunities to increase the diversity of housing available, including plexes, townhomes, cottages, and apartments in locations near services, while maintaining the overall character of the Heights as a medium-density, family-oriented community. Household sizes for owner-occupied units are similar to those in Billings and Yellowstone County, but renter household sizes are significantly larger in the Heights, suggesting that renters are likely housed in single-family detached units. Given the overall downward trend in

household size, both locally and nationally, smaller units will be needed to more appropriately fit the needs of the future population. Billings Heights has a greater share of larger, 4+ bedroom homes, which may be excessive space and unaffordable for smaller households.

The vast majority of houses are single-family detached in the Heights, Billings, and Yellowstone County. More diverse multifamily housing options, such as plexes and townhomes, may help bridge the gap as "missing middle" housing opportunities that are right-sized and more affordable. While the Heights currently has a higher share of 3- or 4-unit structures and more mobile homes than the city and county, it has a slightly lower share of 2-unit structures and significantly fewer structures with over 10 units. Incorporating more apartment buildings and duplexes could help balance out the housing stock and add to housing that serves smaller households that may be cost-burdened.

Overall, the recommended course of action is for the City to promote greater housing efficiency measures such as revising the City's zoning map and regulations to allow a broader diversity of unit types for smaller households at a lower cost. Strategies may include continued preservation of mobile and manufactured home communities, encouraging more types of housing units (such as townhomes, plexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs)), encouraging more housing development (especially apartments) along commercial corridors and in proximity to services. In alignment with recent statewide legislation including the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA), Billings has been working towards some of these strategies.

4.1.5 Encouraging Housing Development

As shown in *Chapter 3.0 – Population Trends; Table 6: Population Projection,* Billings Heights is anticipated to experience continued significant population growth. While the Heights has seen an increase in new housing being built and higher vacancy rates than the city and county, development of new units will need to keep momentum to meet the growing needs of the community. Across Montana, many communities are facing challenges related to the supply of housing to meet the needs of growing populations. In 2023, the state legislature passed the Montana Land Use Planning Act to set guidelines and strategies to encourage more housing development in Montana's larger metropolitan areas. Due to its population, Billings is one of ten cities currently meeting the population threshold that requires MLUPA compliance. More standardized land use planning processes can assist communities like Billings in identifying future housing needs and the public facilities and services that will be needed to support them. This Neighborhood Plan represents part of these efforts, which will contribute to *Billings 2045*, the citywide Growth Policy Update.

MLUPA specifically addresses encouragement of development of housing (MCA 76-25-302). MLUPA requires that the City adopt or implement a minimum of five of a list of fourteen suggested housing strategies where residential development is permitted. Many of the fourteen strategies listed represent elements of zoning code that exist in many jurisdictions that may be barriers to additional housing development. Billings zoning code was analyzed to determine which strategies may already be adopted, and which represent opportunities for implementation to comply with MLUPA and encourage housing development in the City. The MLUPA strategies and Billings City Council decisions on the strategies (adopted as part of Billings 2045) are outlined in Table 15. Recommended actions are carried forward into the Goals and Strategies for this chapter.

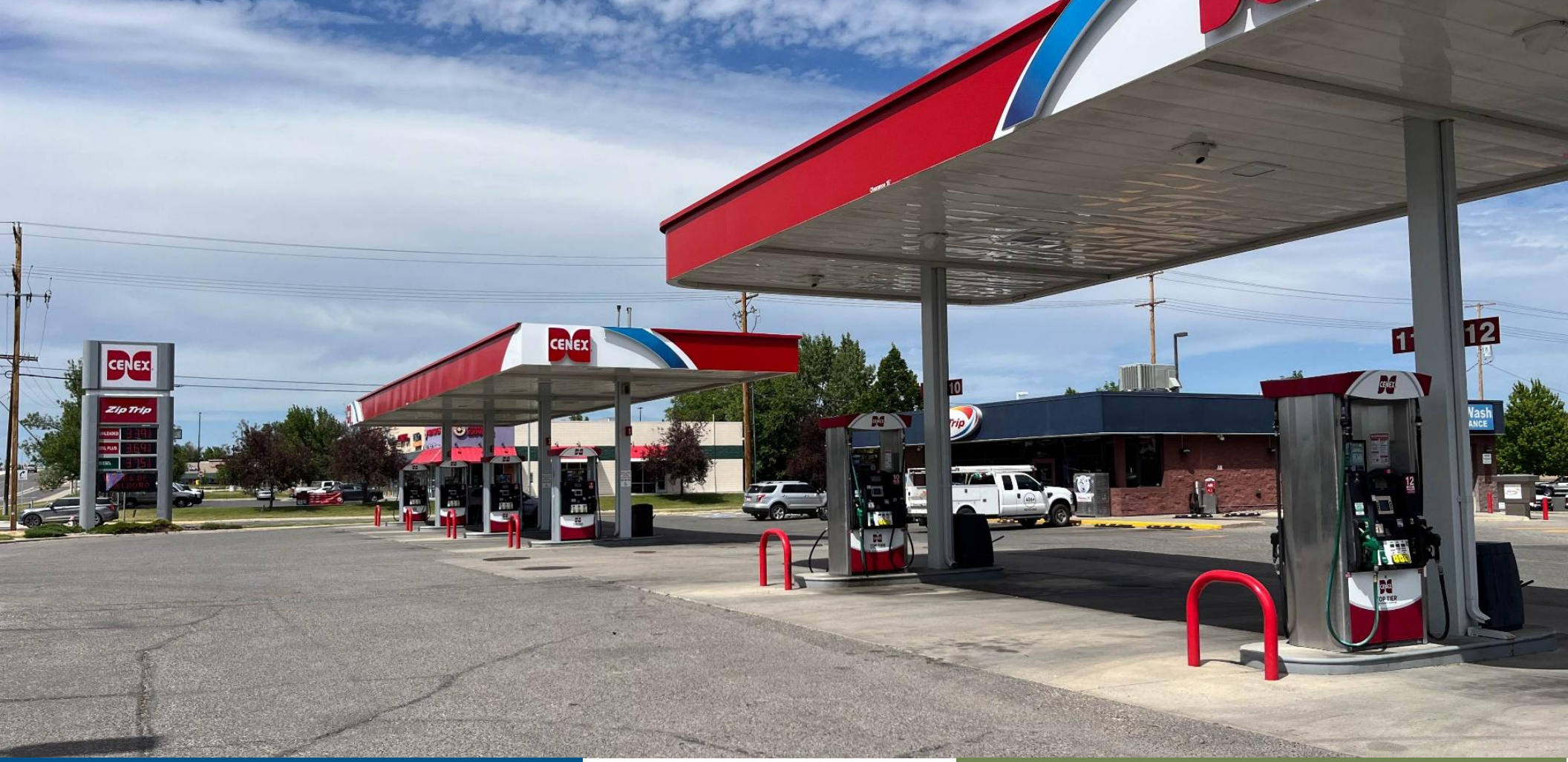
	MLUPA Strategies (MCA 76-25-302(1))	Billings City Council Decision
a	Allow, as a permitted use, for at least a duplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted.	Do not incorporate into the zoning code.
b	Zone for higher density housing near transit stations, places of employment, higher education facilities, and other appropriate population centers, as determined by the local government.	Addressed through adoption of the Future Land Use Map and consideration of nodes (*see Chapter 10 – Future Land Use*).
c	Eliminate or reduce off-street parking requirements to require no more than one parking space per dwelling unit.	Implemented into the zoning code.
d	Eliminate impact fees for accessory dwelling units or developments that include multi-unit dwellings or reduce the fees by at least 25%.	The City will consider the incentive during the next review of the Infill Policy.
e	Allow, as a permitted use, for at least one internal or detached accessory dwelling unit on a lot with a single-unit dwelling occupied as a primary residence.	Implemented into the zoning code.
f	Allow for single-room occupancy developments.	Already implemented in the former zoning code and has been retained in the adopted zoning code.
g	Allow, as a permitted use, a triplex or fourplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted.	The City will consider this change during the next review of the Infill Policy.
h	Eliminate minimum lot sizes or reduce the existing minimum lot size required by at least 25%.	Already implemented in the former zoning code and has been retained in the adopted zoning code.
i	Eliminate aesthetic, material, shape, bulk, size, floor area, and other massing requirements for multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use developments or remove at least half of those requirements.	Do not incorporate into the zoning code.
j	Provide for zoning that specifically allows or encourages the development of tiny houses, as defined in Appendix Q of the International Residential Code as it was printed on January 1, 2023.	Tiny homes are listed as a use within the adopted zoning code.
k	Eliminate setback requirements or reduce existing setback requirements by at least 25%.	Do not incorporate into the zoning code.
l	Increase building height limits for dwelling units by at least 25%.	Do not incorporate into the zoning code.
m	Allow multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use development as a permitted use on all lots where office, retail, or commercial are primary permitted uses.	Already implemented in the former zoning code and has been retained in the adopted zoning code.
n	Allow multi-unit dwellings as a permitted use on all lots where triplexes or fourplexes are permitted uses.	Do not incorporate into the zoning code or explore further.

4.2 Goals

Goal 1: Facilitate the development of a variety of adequate housing to meet anticipated housing needs in the Heights.	
Strategy 1	Encourage the development of tri- and fourplexes as density transitions between larger multifamily developments and surrounding lower density residential areas.
Strategy 2	Monitor for other statewide policies, goals, or best practices for the promotion of housing development.

Goal 2: Encourage strategic infill development while preserving character of the neighborhood.	
Strategy 1	Promote the development or redevelopment of parcels identified as vacant or underutilized in this Neighborhood Plan.
Strategy 2	Develop an incentive program to encourage infill housing development within existing neighborhood developed areas, rather than expansion into surrounding tracts in the Limits of Annexation.
Strategy 3	Work with the Community Development Division to identify grants to support the infill housing development program.
Strategy 4	Work with the City of Billings Public Utility Department to update the Infill Policy and develop incentives to create affordable infill housing, such as through: • Impact fee reductions (MCA 76-25-302(1)(d)) • Homeowner education about the process for utility connections when adding residential units to already-served, developed lots • Streamline permit approval processes for development of additional units, including ADUs and multi-unit dwellings • Reducing the Arterial Construction Fee assessments for infill housing, including ADUs and multi-unit dwellings

Goal 3: Facilitate development of affordable housing types.	
Strategy 1	Amend Article 27-300 to allow greater lot coverage in residential zones.



5.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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5.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Overview

5.1.1 Commercial and Institutional Land

The Heights includes most of the commercial zoning districts available in the City. These zoning classifications include lower intensity Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMU) and Neighborhood Office (NO); mixed-use zones Corridor Mixed-Use (CMU1) and Corridor Mixed-Use and Commercial Centers (CMU2); and higher-intensity General Commercial (C3) and Heavy Commercial (CX) zones. There is currently no industrial zoning in the Heights.

As shown on the zoning map, the majority of commercial zoning is concentrated along the Main Street corridor, with very limited commercial zoning in a few other locations in the Heights, primarily along Wicks Lane.

Public zoning districts, including Public–Civic, Institutional (P2) and Public–Campuses–Medical, Civic, Educational (P3), are also scattered throughout the Heights; these zones ensure space for necessary neighborhood functions like education and healthcare, while also providing employment opportunities in the Heights.

5.1.2 Industry and Labor Overview

Big Sky Economic Development (BSED) Group provided a 2025 overview of industries with a strong presence in the Heights, as well as observations on the workforce in the neighborhood. This overview is included in Appendix 1.

According to the BSED report, sectors with a strong presence in the Heights include Transportation and Warehousing, Real Estate and Leasing, and Accommodation and Food Services. Sectors that are underrepresented and have more space to grow in the neighborhood include Healthcare and Social Assistance, and Profession, Scientific, and Technical Services. The Information Technology sector is underrepresented in the Heights. Sectors with a strong presence may have more competition in the area, whereas underrepresented sectors may represent opportunities for growth.

Based on BSED's data, approximately 88.1% of the Heights' prime-age workforce population (between 25 and 54 years of age) is employed. This rate is significantly higher than state and national averages. The highest-earning industries include Mining, Quarrying, and Oil Extraction; Management of Companies; and Wholesale Trade.

Based on the Montana Department of Labor and Industry's report *Montana Employment Projections: Job Growth from 2021 to 2031*, Healthcare, Construction, Accommodation and Food, Professional and Technical, and Manufacturing industries are expected to experience the most statewide job growth between 2021 and 2031.

5.1.3 Neighborhood Perspective on Economic Development

In the community engagement survey, residents were asked for input on the types of commercial and economic growth needed in the Heights, choosing as many options as they consider to be important. The following is a summary of neighborhood priorities:

- **Restaurants (over 90% of respondents)** – Commenters noted that while there are many fast-food restaurants, they would like to see more restaurants overall, and a greater variety including family-friendly and sit-down options.

- **Small and/or locally owned businesses (over 75% of respondents)** – Much of existing Heights commercial development (primarily along the Main Street corridor) is larger national chains. Neighborhood residents would like more small businesses located in the Heights.

- **Entertainment (over 75% of respondents)** – Survey respondents indicated that the Heights needs more entertainment options, such as arts, culture, activities for families, and nightlife.

- **Large retailers (over 50% of respondents)** – This could include national chains. Several respondents specifically mentioned wanting more grocery store options.

- **Concern about existing overdevelopment of some uses** – Many community members highlighted concern over the predominance of certain types of commercial uses, including casinos, banks, and car washes.

Most survey respondents (approximately 64%) indicated that commercial and economic growth should continue to be concentrated along Main Street. Around half of respondents thought there should be commercial growth mixed into existing development areas or concentrated around other development centers / nodes besides Main Street. Many comments supported mixed-use development and its potential to create vibrant and walkable neighborhoods, as long as the commercial development is compatible with existing neighborhoods.

5.1.4 Commercial Revitalization

Based on community input and survey results, Heights residents generally desire more commercial growth along the Main Street corridor and in other neighborhood commercial nodes. They also would like to see a greater variety of options including restaurants, smaller local businesses, and entertainment in the Heights.

Amongst survey respondents, the top priority identified for revitalizing Main Street and/or other commercial areas in the Heights is improving aesthetics such as through landscaping and signage improvements (approximately 80% of respondents found this to be important). As a close second, over 70% of respondents believe improving safety in commercial areas is important to their revitalization. Other ideas included improving access for walking, bicycling, and transit; hosting special events to attract visitors to Heights businesses; and encouraging mixed-use development.

Survey respondents suggested providing economic incentives to draw more diverse businesses to the Heights. They noted that this would make their neighborhood livelier and reduce the need to travel to other parts of Billings to shop, dine, and recreate.

5.1.5 Neighborhood Work Opportunities

The residents survey for the 2006 Neighborhood Plan found that 77% of respondents would like to work in the Heights. In the 2024 survey, residents were asked whether they work in the Heights, and reasons why or why not. While people do not always have control over the location of their work, the goal was to ask in an open-ended way to determine any common views and experiences related to working within the Heights neighborhood.

Only a third of the survey respondents currently work in the Heights or have worked in the neighborhood in the past. Many respondents work from home or in nearby downtown Billings. Several respondents felt the Heights does not have sufficient employment opportunities, or that the options available in the neighborhood do not match their field of employment.

5.2 Goals

Goal 1: Create an organized, collaborative network to promote businesses in the Heights.	
Strategy 1	Reinvigorate the Heights Business Group, its online presence, and related neighborhood business marketing activities.
Strategy 2	The Heights Business Group should maintain a directory of existing businesses in the Heights.
Strategy 3	Prioritize communication with the Heights Business Group on City matters impacting the area businesses. This could include: • Identify a specific contact person at the City that can assist with neighborhood economic development issues and opportunities, such as in the Community Development and/or Finance departments. • Maintain regular communication between the Heights Business Group and the City. • Notify the Heights Business Group of development applications within the Heights.
Strategy 4	Explore opportunities for greater collaboration with local organizations including the Billings Chamber of Commerce and Visit Billings to promote business and recreation in the Heights.

Goal 2: Promote specific economic development activities in strategic locations.	
Strategy 1	Request City Council approval to approve a committee and/or project to study the feasibility of developing an Urban Renewal District (URD) in the Heights, to enable Tax Increment Financing (TIF).
Strategy 2	Provide financial incentives such as TIF to attract new businesses and corporations.
Strategy 3	Identify and facilitate development in specific economic development focus areas that present opportunities for more commercial and mixed-use development. • The area north of Wicks Lane is a prime development corridor that could provide essential services to the Heights. • Opportunities at key intersections along new road connections to the Heights (the Bypass and Belt Loop).
Strategy 4	Inventory vacant commercial buildings or potential commercial lots for infill development.
Strategy 5	Encourage repurposing and/or redeveloping of vacant commercial buildings, such as through reducing impact fees or permit fees, or streamlining the permitting process for redevelopment sites.
Strategy 6	As the neighborhood expands north to include existing County heavy commercial and industrial land, consider supporting new industrial zoning to capture potential industrial development and the employment opportunities it could bring to the neighborhood.
Strategy 7	In response to community concerns about overdevelopment of some commercial uses such as casinos, banks, and car washes, consider potential limitations to the locations of these uses, which could allow preserving space in key economic development areas for specific uses the community feels are lacking, such as restaurants, entertainment, and local and/or small and medium businesses.

Goal 3: Attract and retain local and small/medium businesses in the Heights.	
Strategy 1	The Heights Business Group, in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, could create an active marketing campaign targeting small and medium businesses to establish or invest in a Heights location.
Strategy 2	Develop a brochure to distribute to the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Realtors to market the Heights for business opportunities. Materials could provide a variety of relevant information such as: • Population and economic data and projections • Real estate listings, highlighting potential locations for businesses of a range of types and sizes
Strategy 3	Encourage the construction and renovation of attractive office buildings with the infrastructure to support starter businesses and attract small and medium established businesses.
Strategy 4	Expand on existing or past “Small Business Saturday” and local shopping and dining marketing campaigns and events to highlight and promote local and/or small and medium businesses in the Heights, particularly restaurants and entertainment options.

Goal 4: Support safe and convenient physical access to businesses in the Heights.	
Strategy 1	Review the access study completed by the Montana Department of Transportation for Main Street and identify recommendations that can be prioritized for implementation.
Strategy 2	In future roadway planning and design projects, prioritize safety and comfort of non-motorized infrastructure along Main Street to improve safety and convenience of access to businesses.
Strategy 3	Through transportation system planning and design efforts, continue to encourage use of alternate routes for traffic that will lessen the intensity of the existing traffic on Main Street, allowing smoother traffic operations to gain access to businesses.

Goal 5: Improve the aesthetics of commercial areas in the Heights (Main Street and elsewhere).	
Strategy 1	Encourage high quality development guidelines to ensure organized growth and development of businesses.
Strategy 2	Review and update the city site development code for parking and landscaping.
Strategy 3	Encourage more streetscape and landscape design during reconstruction projects on the main transportation routes.
Strategy 4	Update the city sign code.
Strategy 5	Consider potential financial incentives for site and building aesthetic upgrades along Main Street, such as a façade improvement grant program or encouraging public art installations.



6.0 UTILITIES

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6.0 UTILITIES

6.1 Overview

Utilities in the Heights neighborhood support and influence development throughout the area. Infrastructure development is a critical piece in determining how and where development can occur, including infill development and when considering annexation of properties within the Limits of Annexation.

Based on engagement survey responses, most residents feel that utility service is adequate in the Heights. In the public engagement survey, 66% and 61% of survey respondents agreed sewer and water service is adequate, respectively. Fifty-eight percent (58%) feel adequately served by trash and recycling services. Fifty-three percent (53%) feel that stormwater drainage and management is adequate in the Heights.

However, there is inconsistency throughout the Heights as it relates to public utilities. Because many areas of the Heights began development under Yellowstone County and were later annexed into the City of Billings, pockets of less-developed infrastructure remain. There are also several county islands and peripheral developed areas within the Heights neighborhood boundary which maintain onsite water and septic systems. The Limits of Annexation include many of these areas. Future annexation and associated utility upgrades could enable redevelopment of older, lower density areas, contributing to more housing and other land uses in the neighborhood.

6.1.1 Public Utilities

This section summarizes different utility systems that currently exist within the Heights.

Water

Figure 10 illustrates water infrastructure available in the Heights, which is operated by either the City of Billings or the County Water District of Billings Heights.

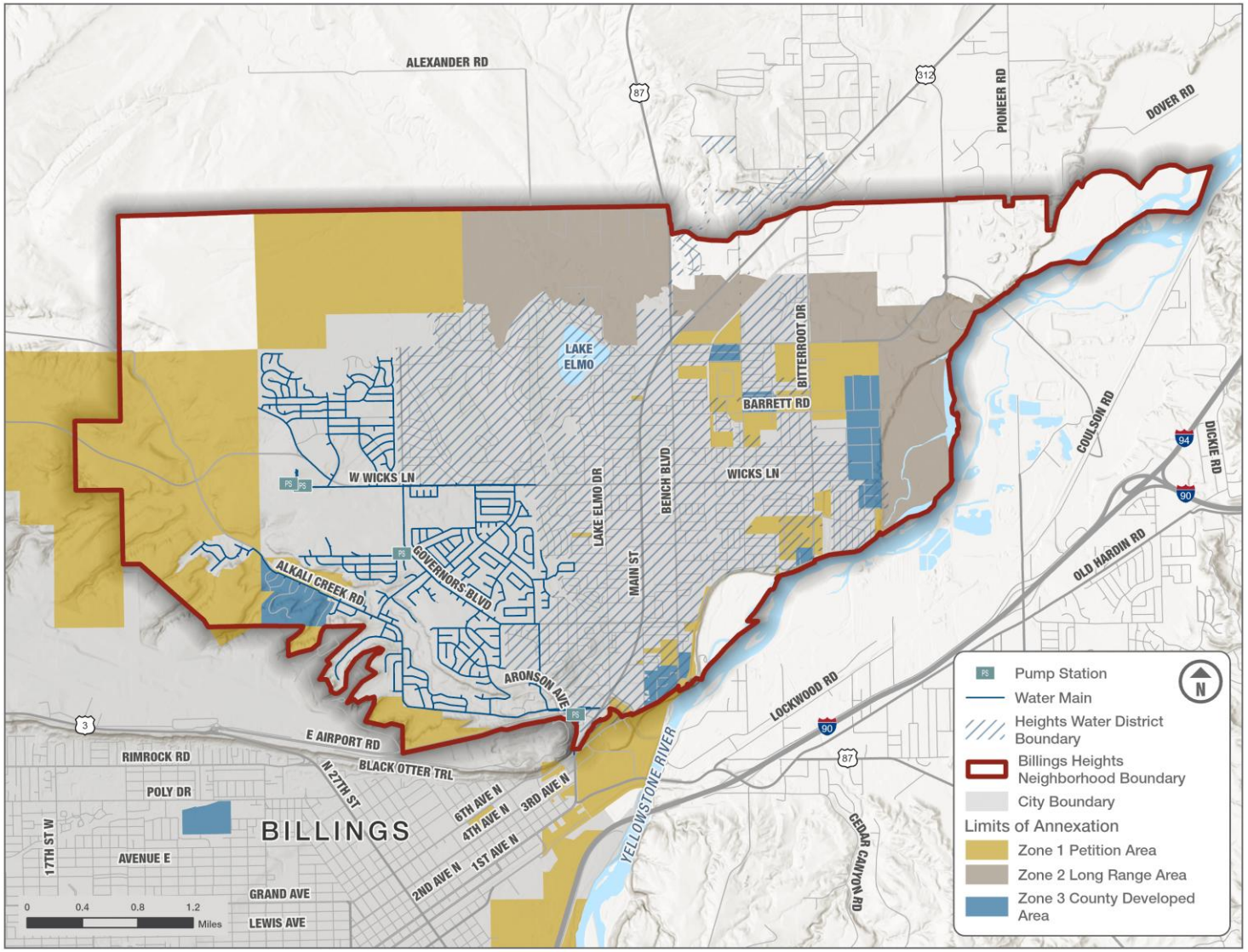
- The **City of Billings** supplies water to limited portions of the west side of the Heights neighborhood. The City maintains a master plan of project needs and identifies the next five years of projects and their budgets in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP also identifies projects beyond the five-year threshold. Current versions of CIP are available for review on the City website. Projects identified in the current CIP are included in Table 16.

- The **County Water District of Billings Heights** (the District) purchases water from the city for distribution within the remainder of the Heights (excluding areas outside city limits that have onsite wells). The District operates and maintains over 140 miles of distribution pipe and currently has more than 5,800 service connections. The system also includes seven pump stations and a total of six million gallons of water storage among three tanks.

  The District does not have a comprehensive master plan addressing future system improvements and expansion. Important documents relevant to corridor development and water system installations can be found on the District's website, https://www.heightswaterdistrict.com/.

It is noted by some developers that the cost of water service in the Heights can limit commercial development. A merger between the two public utility entities is currently under consideration.

Figure 10: Water Infrastructure



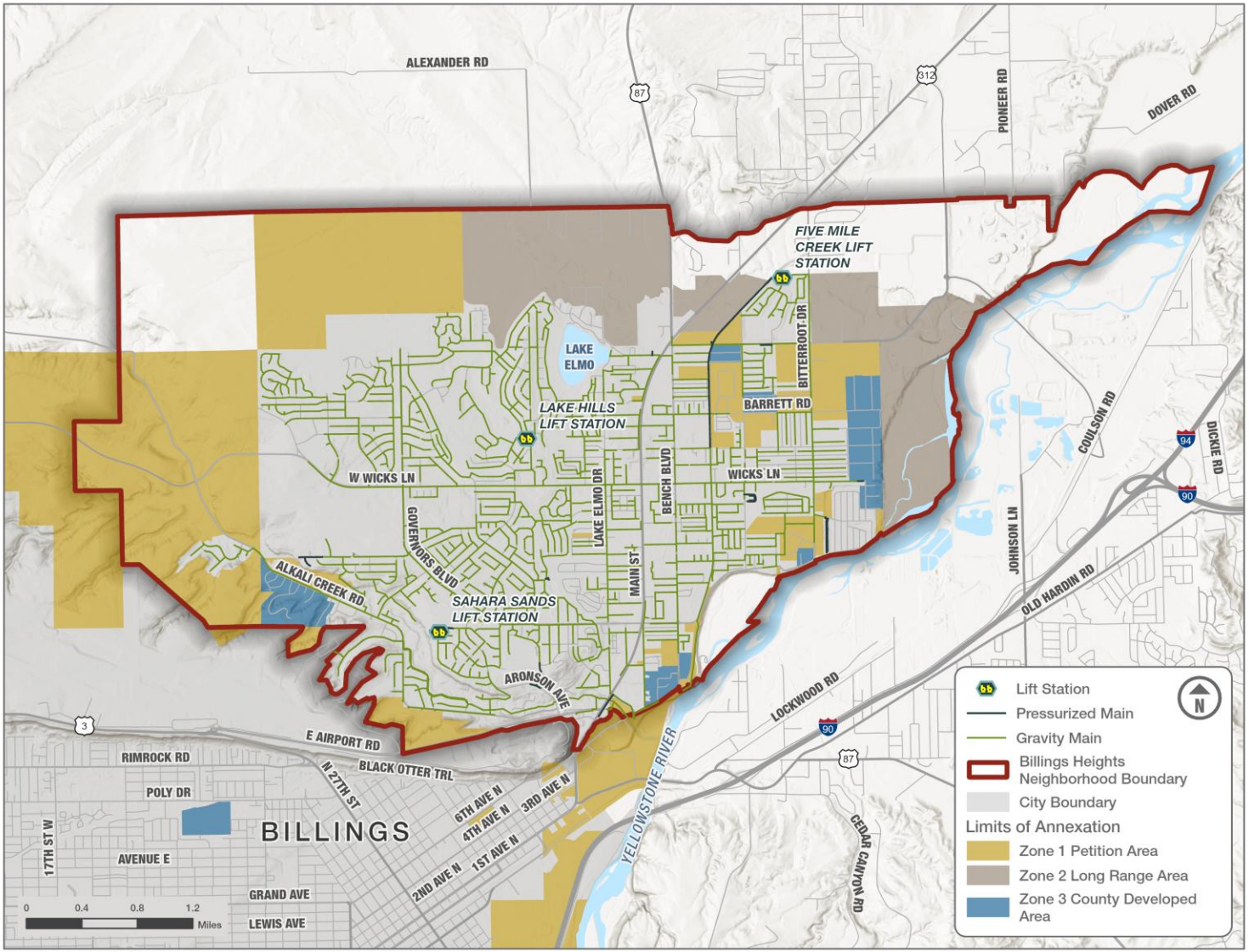
Sewer

With the exception of the few former-county parcels that are on their own septic systems, sanitary sewer service is provided by the City of Billings. The public sewer system is operated and maintained by the Public Works Department. Figure 11 illustrates the City's existing sewer facilities within the Heights. Existing large-diameter trunk mains convey sewer flows by gravity to one of three Lift Stations in the Heights. These lift stations then pump the wastewater through a pressurized force main to an interceptor sewer that flows to the Water Reclamation Facility.

The City maintains a comprehensive master plan for their sanitary sewer system that addresses future system improvements and extensions, which are then incorporated into the CIP project list. Several sewer projects that will impact the Heights are listed for upcoming years in Table 16.

The master plan is updated regularly, typically every five years, or more often if the need arises for a particular portion of the system. Important documents relevant to corridor development and sewer system installations can be found on the City's website.

Figure 11: Sanitary Sewer Infrastructure



6.1.2 Stormwater Infrastructure

The City also provides storm drainage infrastructure in the Heights, as shown in Figure 12.

Through community engagement for this plan, many residents noted that stormwater drainage is inadequate in some locations of the Heights. In areas where stormwater drainage infrastructure is unavailable or inadequate, large puddles of standing water or drainage channels with fast flowing water may occur when there is significant precipitation. These areas need to be addressed as they can pose public safety hazards or risk of property damage. Poorly drained areas can also block roadway access for residents and emergency vehicles and personnel.

Additional development in the Heights has the effect of increasing impervious area, including buildings and paved areas. As ongoing development is anticipated throughout the neighborhood, it is especially important to provide adequate drainage facilities with new development, and redevelopment projects should assess existing facilities to determine if upgrades are needed.

In 2024, the City of Billings established a stormwater utility to help fund needed stormwater infrastructure improvements. Planned improvements are guided by the existing stormwater management plan, and projects recommended through this plan can be identified in the CIP (see Table 16).



Figure 12: Existing Stormwater Infrastructure

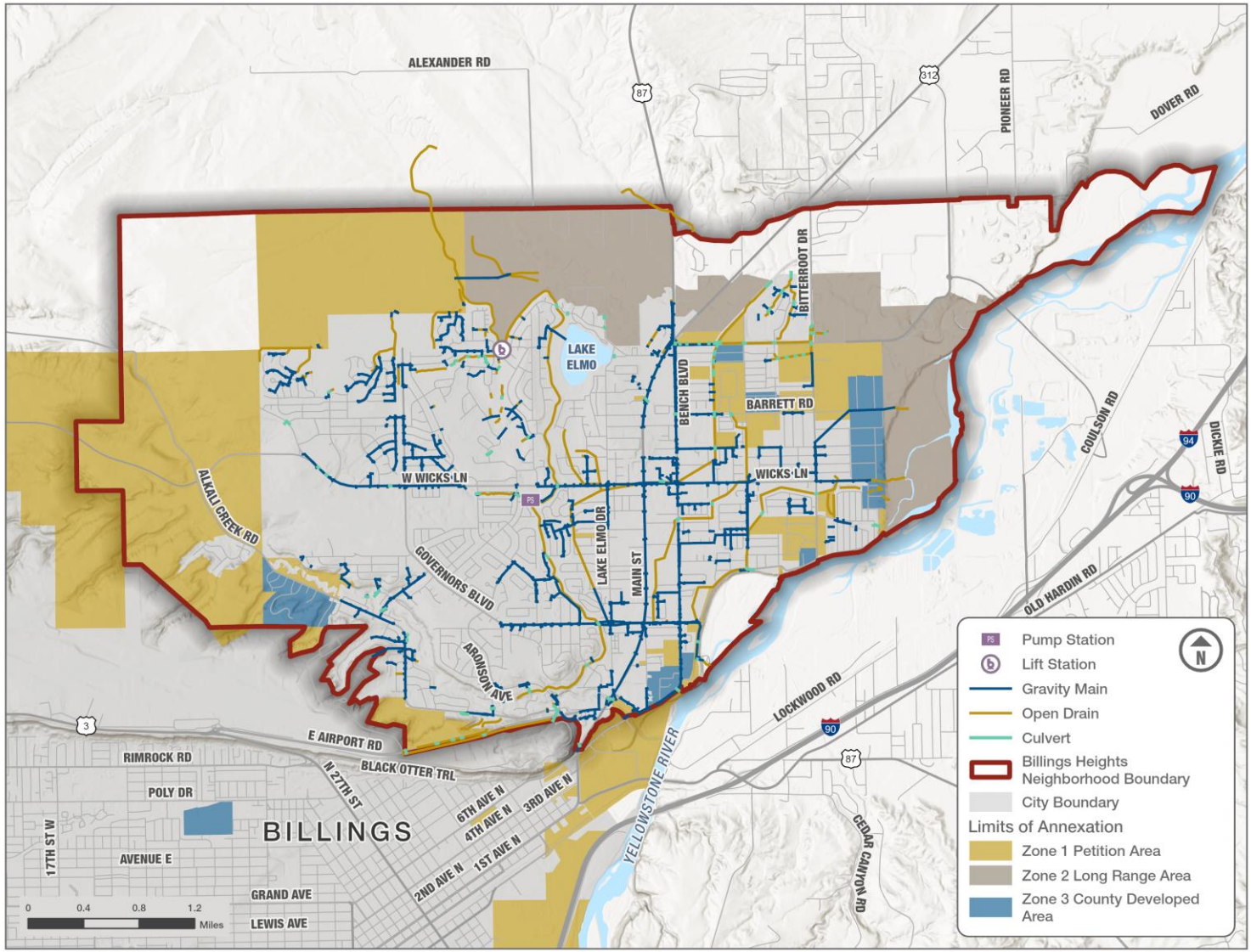


Table 15: Capital Improvement Plan Projects in the Heights and Citywide, FY 2027-2031

CIP Project	Location Impacted	Description	Fiscal Year(s)	Estimated Cost
Wicks Lane Outfall Rehab (Stormwater)	Billings Heights	This project will formalize the Wicks Lane storm drain outfall channel located east of the intersection of Wicks Lane and River View Drive. The channel will be reconstructed and graded from the current storm drain pipe terminus point on Wicks Lane to the side channel of the Yellowstone River located approximately 1,500-feet east of the intersection.	2027	$200,000
Yellowstone River Outfall Improvements (Stormwater)	Citywide	This project occurs at each of the City's eleven primary stormwater outfalls into the Yellowstone River.	2027-2030	$1,250,000 per year
Annual Local Area Capital Improvements (Stormwater)	Citywide	This is an annual project to improve intersections and other local areas with storm drainage problems.	Annual	$180,000 in 2027, increases each year
Annual Detention Pond Upgrades (Stormwater)	Citywide	This project will make improvements and modifications and modifications to the City's existing detention pond network.	Annual	$297,000 in 2027, increases each year
Annual Boulder Pit Upgrades and Replacements (Stormwater)	Citywide	This is an annual project that will improve failing boulder pits through replacement or extending to other stormwater facilities.	Annual	$444,000 in 2027, increases each year
Wastewater - Hydrogen Sulfide Mitigation	Citywide	This project will fund the construction of buildings and upgrades needed to mitigate Hydrogen Sulfide (H2S) in the system.	2027	$520,000
Wastewater Compensation Agreements	Citywide	This is an on-going program to fund compensation agreements with private developers for oversizing sewer mains and other City authorized costs.	2027-2031	$300,000 per year
Wastewater - Annual Main Replacements	Citywide	This is an annual program to fund the replacement of sanitary sewer mains throughout the City.	Annual	$6,900,000 in 2027, increases each year
Wastewater - Annual Line Extensions	Citywide	This project will fund developer-driven extensions as developments occur in previously unserved areas.	Annual	$1,000,000 per year
Wastewater – Annual Treatment Plant Campus Electrical	Citywide	This is a project to fund various electrical and automation projects at the Water Reclamation Facility.	Annual	$300,000 per year

Table 15: Capital Improvement Plan Projects in the Heights and Citywide, FY 2027-2031

CIP Project	Location Impacted	Description	Fiscal Year(s)	Estimated Cost
Skyway Drive Waterline Loop	Billings Heights	This project will construct approximately 5000 ft of waterline in Zone 4N. A pressure-reducing valve is required to reduce pressure to Zone 3E.	2030 2031	$300,000 $2,900,000
Fox Reservoir #1 Replacement	Billings Heights	This project will replace the existing reservoir.	2031	$500,000
Annual Yellowstone River Flood Protection	Citywide	Improve the stormwater outfalls to the Yellowstone River.	Annual	$113,000 in 2027, increases each year
Annual Water Quality Improvements	Citywide	Add stormwater water quality improvements to various locations throughout Billings.	Annual	$300,000 in 2027, increases each year

6.1.3 Solid Waste Services

The City of Billings Solid Waste Division provides weekly garbage collection, yard waste recycling, and landfill operations to areas incorporated into the City of Billings. Several independent firms are available to serve properties outside of the city limits. All Heights residents are able to use the City landfill.

6.1.4 Private Utilities

There are a number of private utility companies providing services to and/or routing services through the area.

Power

Northwestern Energy has electric utility infrastructure throughout City of Billings, including overhead and underground lines. Yellowstone Valley Electric Company also provides electric service throughout Yellowstone County.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications utilities in the Heights include Spectrum (fiber optics) along with TDS Fiber and Ziply Fiber, both of which are currently installing new fiber optic internet lines in the neighborhood.

In stakeholder engagement activities, it was noted that the installation of fiber optic utilities is progressing more slowly than planned in the Heights due to rocky conditions. The availability of high-speed internet supports economic development and quality of life for residents, so it is important that these improvements continue to be made alongside new growth and development in the neighborhood.

Natural Gas and Petroleum

Montana Dakota Utilities has natural gas transmission lines throughout the Heights. Though not providing utility service to customers, Phillips 66 also has gas pipelines that cross through the neighborhood, including an oil pipeline near Kiwanis Trail, north of Mary Street, and on the east side of US 87.

6.2 Goals

Goal 1: Promote efficient use of existing and new/upgraded utility infrastructure via infill development.	
Strategy 1	The City is planning to update its Infill Policy in 2027. As part of this update, consider establishing an incentive program to encourage infill development to facilitate efficient use of existing and new/upgraded utility infrastructure.
Strategy 2	Following adoption of a new Infill Policy, work collaboratively with developers to encourage the use of City incentive programs and other strategies to make efficient use of existing utility infrastructure and new or upgraded facilities.

Goal 2: Improve stormwater drainage.	
Strategy 1	The City of Billings Public Works Department and staff focused on the new stormwater program should collaborate to inventory and develop a list of areas where standing water and runoff is a problem.
Strategy 2	Regularly update a Stormwater Master Plan for all areas of the Heights.
Strategy 3	As part of the planning process, identify mitigation projects to address drainage issues.
Strategy 4	Continue to include stormwater improvements in the Capital Improvement Plan.
Strategy 5	Incorporate new technology and best practices into public and private design requirements related to stormwater runoff and detention.



7.0 COMMUNITY FACILITIES

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7.0 COMMUNITY FACILITIES

7.1 Overview

Existing community facilities in the Heights include public schools and public and private parks and recreation facilities.

As the Heights population grows, and residential development is likely to continue to the north and west, it is likely that more community facilities including schools, parks, and other facilities such as community centers, library facilities, youth services, and senior services may be needed.

7.1.1 Schools

The first school opened in Billings on September 17, 1883 with an enrollment of 56 pupils. Based on a review of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, the Billings school system has an enrollment of more than 16,000 students. Billings Public Schools, or Billings School District 2, is the public school district for the area, and it is comprised of the Billings Elementary School District (total enrollment approximately 11,000) and Billings High School District (total enrollment approximately 5,500). Additional private schools and childcare centers also serve the area.

In the Heights, there are seven public elementary schools (including one Yellowstone County school outside Billings School District 2), two public middle schools, and one public high school. Notably, Medicine Crow Middle School opened in 2016 and was built to help alleviate overcrowding in district middle schools. Schools in the Heights are listed in Table 17 and shown on the map in Figure 13.

In the community engagement survey, 29% of respondents strongly agreed that the Heights is adequately served by the area schools, and 41% moderately agreed. This may indicate improvement from the perspective reflected in the 2006 plan – at that time, many residents had concerns about adequate schools and overcrowding. Even with the addition of Medicine Crow Middle School since the time of the 2006 plan, a few respondents still expressed concern about future school capacity given that the neighborhood population continues to grow.

In 2006, survey respondents considered the number one issue facing schools in the Heights was the school district's ability to respond to the needs of changing demographics. Though not necessarily based in the Heights, the district added and expanded programming for adults, multilingual students, career and technical learning opportunities, early college, and other "School within a School" programs. Survey results showing that serving changing demographics is still a concern for Heights residents suggest that ongoing expansion of these programs is valued by the community.

Several survey respondents indicated that more after-school programs for children and teenagers are needed. Other concerns included a lack of adequate funding for new and renovated school buildings. It will be important to continue to monitor school capacity and facility needs to help guide capital improvement projects and identify other funding sources that can support expanded programming to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and the childcare needs of parents and caregivers in the neighborhood.

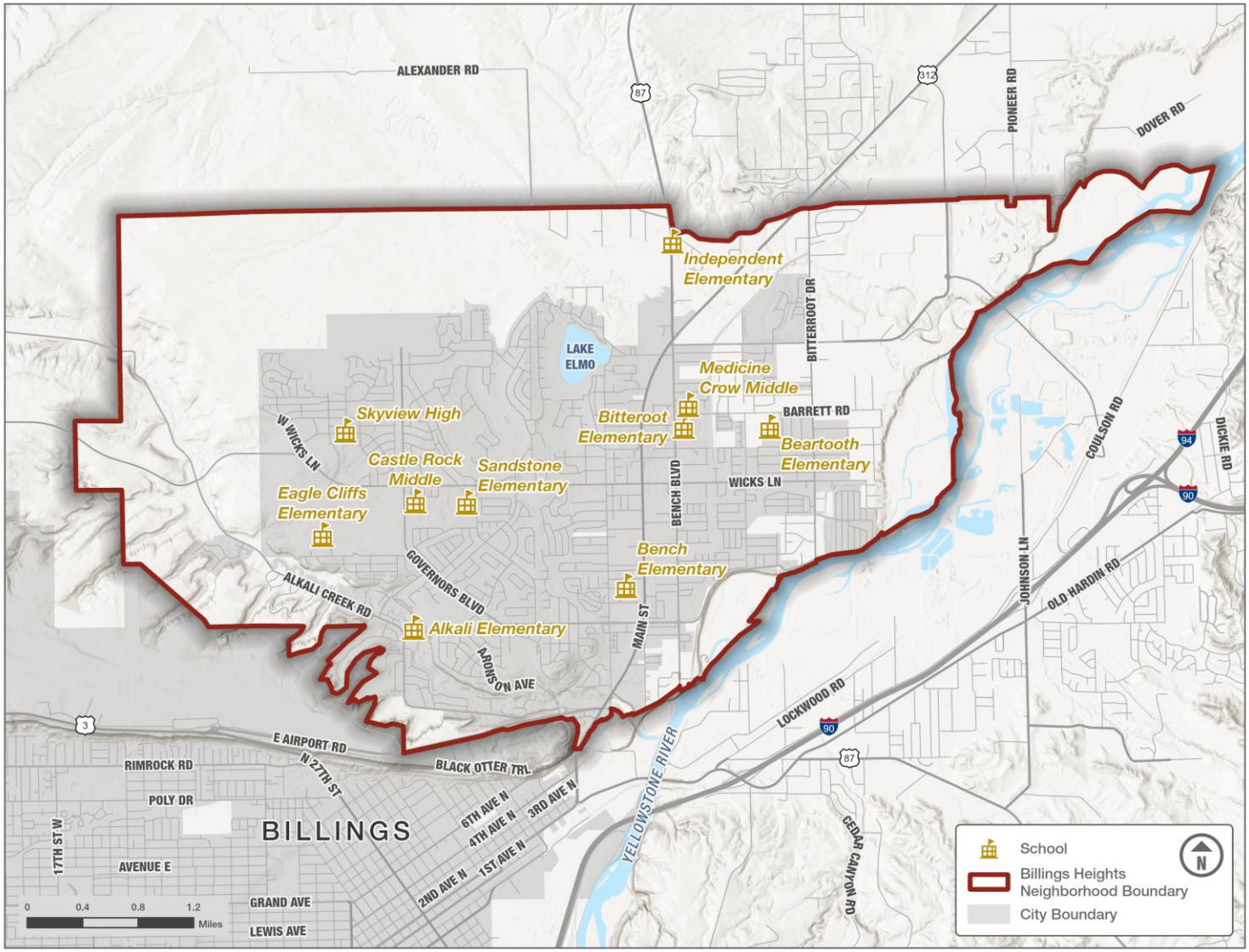
It is important to note that Billings Public Schools maintains their own regular facilities and programming planning efforts that are more in-depth and more frequently updated than this Neighborhood Plan. Future community discussions about schools in the Heights should reference these plans.

Table 16: Schools in the Heights

School Type	School Name	Address	Enrollment[1]
Elementary School	Alkali Creek Elementary School	681 Alkali Creek Road	310
	Beartooth Elementary School	1345 Elaine Street	373
	Bench Elementary School	505 Milton Road	332
	Bitterroot Elementary School	1801 Bench Boulevard	264
	Eagle Cliffs Elementary School	1201 Kootenai Avenue	443
	Independent Elementary School *(Yellowstone County)*	2907 Roundup Road	272
	Sandstone Elementary School	1440 Nutter Boulevard	393
Middle School	Castle Rock Middle School	1441 Governor's Boulevard	691
	Medicine Crow Middle School	900 Barrett Road	517
High School	Skyview High School	1775 High Sierra Boulevard	1,542

1 Student enrollment data is from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as of March 2026.

Figure 13: Schools



7.1.2 Parks and Recreation

The City of Billings Department of Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands (PRPL) manages parks and recreation within the City of Billings. The Heights includes twelve official Billings PRPL park facilities, Lake Elmo State Park, John H. Dover Memorial Park (owned and operated by Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA)), Two Moon Park (owned by the County and managed by YRPA), and other privately owned recreation areas including Oasis Water Park and the Lake Hills Golf Course. Table 18 lists the size, location, and amenities for each of the formal PRPL parks and other primary parks in the neighborhood. Proposed improvements to Castle Rock Park were approved by the City in 2021 as part of a Master Plan process; the preferred site plan is shown in Figure 14. Locations of parks throughout the Heights are shown in Figure 15.

Other privately-owned open space areas are also scattered throughout the neighborhood, typically within residential subdivisions; these are also mapped in Figure 15. There is one cemetery in the neighborhood, Riverside Cemetery, which is owned by the County.

A system of trails for pedestrians and bicycles provides additional recreation and transportation opportunities in the Heights. Information on bicycle and pedestrian trails and other non-motorized transportation routes is included in *Chapter 9 – Transportation*.

The largest share of community engagement survey respondents moderately agree that the Heights is adequately served by parks and recreation facilities (46% of respondents). An additional 27% moderately disagreed, and 11% strongly disagreed, that the neighborhood has adequate parks and recreation facilities. These results indicate that the neighborhood generally feels that more parks and recreation facilities are needed in the Heights.

From a list of different types of parks and recreation facilities, survey respondents were asked to select all that are most needed and/or important to them. Over 60% of respondents highlighted the need for indoor multi-purpose facilities for events. Outdoor gathering spaces, swimming pools, athletic fields and courts, trails, community gardens, and playground equipment were also highlighted by at least 40% of respondents each.

Additional suggestions from the survey and meetings included pickleball and tennis facilities and more swimming facilities. Multiple survey respondents indicated appreciation for improvements at Castle Rock Park but a desire to see further improvements. Many residents highlighted the need for more parks and recreation facilities in the northwestern part of the Heights given the current and potential future neighborhood expansion in this area.

Future Billings Heights public parks and recreation improvements that were included in the Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2026 to 3020 and 2027-2031 are listed in Table 19. CIP projects are large projects costing at least $25,000 that result in permanent facility or infrastructure additions or improvements. For parks and recreation, examples could include new parks or playground replacements. Facilities identified in park plans may also appear in future CIPs.

Table 17: Parks in the Heights

Park Name	Management	Size	Location	Amenities
Arrowhead Park	City	1.5 acres	Crow Lane and Blackfoot Drive	Ballfield, basketball court, horseshoe court, picnic site, playground, and restrooms
Castle Rock Park	City	25 acres	Wicks Lane and Nutter Boulevard	Horseshoe court, picnic site, playground, restrooms, athletic field, tennis courts, and sprayground
Clevenger Park	City	7 acres	Bench Boulevard and Shawnee Drive	Ballfields
Edgerton Park	City	5 acres	Norris Court off Nutter Boulevard	Basketball court, horseshoe courts, natural area, picnic site, playground, restrooms, and athletic field
Frances Park	City	3 acres	Burning Tree Drive off Wentworth Drive	Playground and athletic field
Hawthorne Park	City	4 acres	Maurine Street and Columbine Drive	Horseshoe court, picnic site, playground, restrooms, athletic field, and wading pool
High Sierra Park	City	24 acres	West End of Wicks Lane	Disc golf course, dog park, natural area, restrooms, and athletic field
John H. Dover Memorial Park	Yellowstone River Parks Association	Around 140 acres, future expansion to over 600 acres	Mary Street	Trails, activities building, picnic sites, restrooms, river access, and natural areas
Lake Elmo State Park	State	123 acres	Rolling Hills Drive	Reservoir that can be used for swimming, boating, paddleboarding, fishing; nature trail; playground; picnic shelters; dog park
Meadowlark Park	City	14 acres	Cody Drive and Covert Lane	Natural wetlands
Oasis Waterpark	Private	6.8 acres	Aronson Avenue	Swimming pool, locker rooms, concessions, and community center
Pow Wow Park	City	60 acres	Senators Boulevard and Judicial Lane	Jogging trails (unpaved) and natural area
Primrose Park	City	3 acres	Reece Drive and Galaway Drive	Picnic area, playground, athletic field. Part of Parkland Gleaning Project, to harvest fruit from public trees across Billings.

Table 17: Parks in the Heights

Park Name	Management	Size	Location	Amenities
Two Moon Park	Yellowstone County / Yellowstone River Parks Association	150.6 acres	Two Moon Park Road	Trails, restrooms, and natural riverfront area
Uinta Park	City	4 acres	Uinta Park Drive and Twin Oaks Drive	Jogging trails (paved), picnic site, and playground
Walden Grove Park	City	2 acres	Hemmingway Avenue and Cottonwood Boulevard	Jogging trails (paved), playground, and athletic field
Walsh Park	City	5 acres	Toole Court and Babcock Boulevard	Basketball court, horseshoe courts, picnic site, and playground



View of Lake Elmo State Park

Figure 14: Castle Rock Park Master Plan

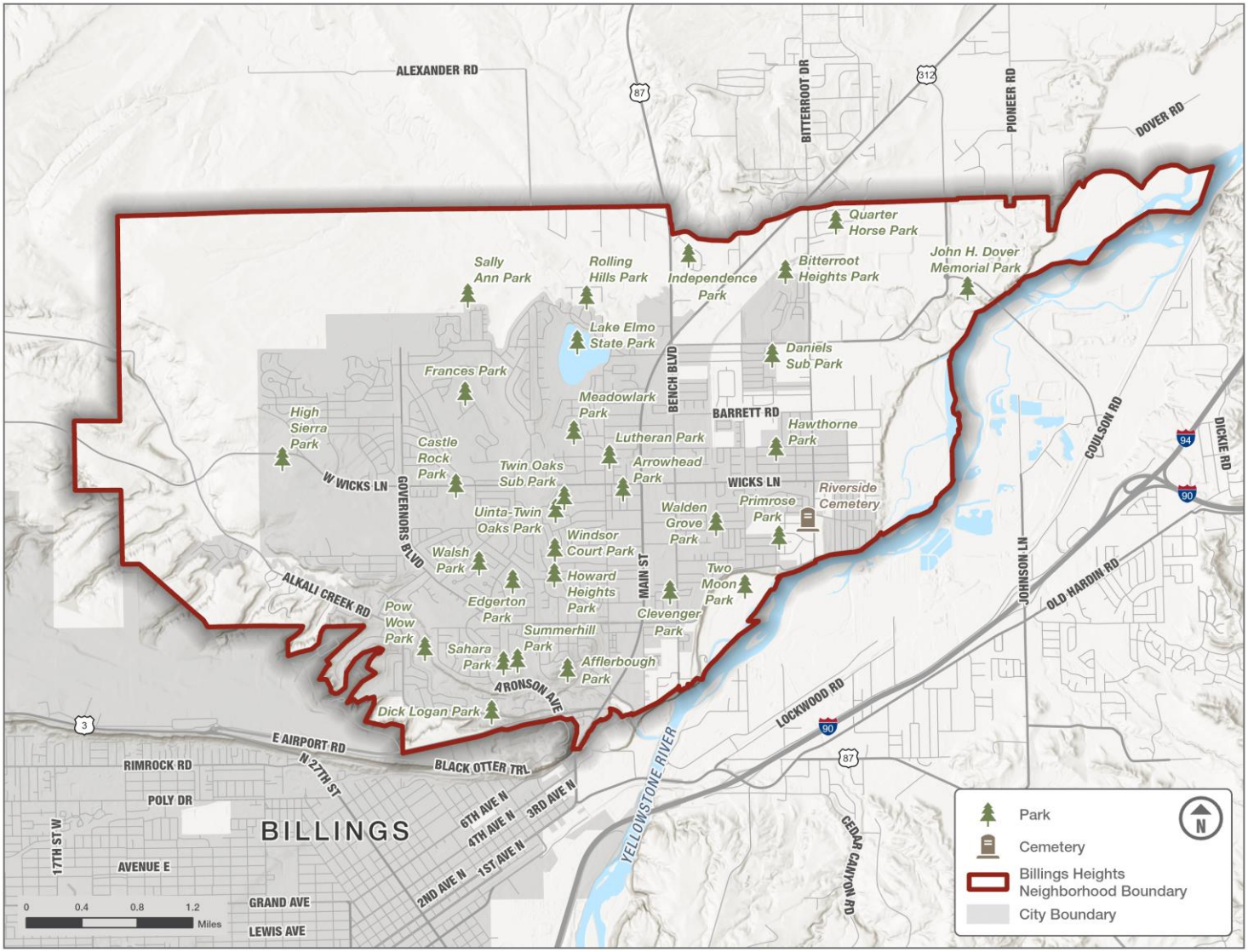


Prepared by Cushing Terrell, approved January 2021.

Table 18: Parks Capital Improvement Projects

CIP	Proposed CIP Project	Description *(with Justification)*	Fiscal Year(s)	Estimated Cost
FY26-30	Francis Park Playground Replacement	Replace the main playground equipment at Francis Park. *The playground equipment at Francis Park is nearing the end of its useful life. Replacement equipment and parts availability is limited as play equipment approaches its end of life cycle.*	2029	$100,000
FY26-30	Unita Park Playground Replacement	Replace the main playground equipment at Unita Park. *The playground equipment at Unita Park is nearing the end of its useful life. Replacement equipment and parts availability is limited as play equipment approaches its end of life cycle.*	2029	$100,000
FY26-30	Waldon Grove Park Playground Replacement	Replace the main playground equipment at Waldon Grove Park. *The playground equipment at Waldon Grove Park is nearing the end of its useful life. Replacement equipment and parts availability is limited as play equipment approaches its end of life cycle.*	2029	$100,000
FY26-30	Walsh Park Playground Replacement	Replace the playground equipment at Walsh Park. *The playground equipment at Walsh Park is nearing the end of its useful life. Replacement equipment and repair parts are increasingly harder to find and purchase.*	2030	$350,000
FY27-31	High Sierra Dog Park Sidewalks	Install concrete sidewalks for ADA access at the dog park in High Sierra Park. *Walkways and trails through dog park are currently wood chips/mulch and limit access. Concrete walkways will be ADA compliant and provide access for all park users.*	2027	$90,000
FY27-31	Edgerton Playground Replacement and Restroom Remodel	Replace the playground equipment and remodel the restrooms with shelter at Edgerton Park. *The playground equipment at Edgerton Park is nearing the end of its useful life and is currently scheduled for replacement in FY28. The restroom building has an attached shelter which both are in need of renovations. The shelter is rented out to the public for special events.*	2028	$500,000
FY27-31	Hawthorne Park Wading Pool Replacement	Replace the wading pool at Hawthorne Park. *The Hawthorne Park Wading Pool has reached the end of its useful life and needs to be replaced. Based on the results of an aquatic evaluation study in FY 24 which will included wading pools, this project will implement those recommendations.*	2030 2031	$270,000 $500,000

Figure 15: Parks



7.1.3 Other Community Facilities and Services

Outside of schools and parks, other community facilities and services can support neighborhood quality of life, social connection between neighbors, and public health. Some of these facilities and services are directly provided by the City or County, and funding can be allocated to capital or programmatic improvements through budgeting processes. While some other facilities and programs that provide recreation, care, cultural, or other services may not necessarily be provided by local government, there may be opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Categories of community facilities and services are outlined below, along with neighborhood resident feedback collected as part of this plan update process.

Youth Services

As of the 2006 plan, neighborhood feedback indicated that there were not enough youth facilities in the Heights, such as recreation, entertainment, and after school programs. About two decades later, most community engagement survey respondents still feel youth services are lacking in the Heights (65% of community engagement survey respondents either moderately or strongly *disagree* that the Heights has adequate youth services).

Senior Services

Senior services were generally considered adequate in 2006, and it appears this is still considered adequate today. There are several senior housing, assisted living, memory care, and other facilities in the Heights. As the population continues to age, more senior housing and services are expected to be needed in the future, along with recreation opportunities, community spaces, and other public facility and service accommodations that are inclusive of older adults living in the Heights.

Library Facilities

Less than a third of survey respondents agreed that the Heights adequately served by the Billings Public Library. While there are book lockers available in the Heights to help provide local connections to the library, there is desire for a full library branch in the neighborhood.

Community Centers

As noted earlier in this chapter, 60% of survey respondents highlighted the need for indoor multi-purpose facilities for events. However, 81% of respondents moderately or strongly *disagree* that there is a need for more community centers or other facilities with spaces and/or programs that can serve all ages. Further study may be needed to determine what indoor spaces are available for community events and programs, and whether there are specific areas or programs that may be gaps.

7.2 Goals

Goal 1: Maintain an open line of communication between the School District and Heights residents.	
Strategy 1	During monthly Heights Neighborhood Task Force meetings, request an update and report from a School Board Representative to inform and educate residents. This should include: • School District projects • School District future plans (facilities, operations, etc.) • Major discussions held by the School Board
Strategy 2	Inform the School District on concerns, questions and recommendations residents have concerning education in the Heights.
Strategy 3	The School District Facilities Director can serve as a contact person for suggestions and concerns about school district property in need of improvement or maintenance.

Goal 2: Provide a range of educational opportunities for school-aged children and people of all ages.	
Strategy 1	The School District should continue to offer and expand education programs and "School within a School" opportunities to serve the growing and increasingly diverse student population in Billings, including: • Freshman-specific programming • Early college • Multilingual programs • Career and vocational programs • Adult education
Strategy 2	The City should explore strategies to expand childcare offerings in partnership with the school district.
Strategy 3	As diverse program offerings continue to expand, these should be distributed throughout Billings, including in the Heights.
Strategy 4	As part of regular strategic planning efforts, the Billings Public Library should explore feasibility for establishing a branch library in the Heights.
Strategy 5	As part of a potential future library expansion in the Heights, include additional indoor space for community gathering and events, along with education and recreation programming for people of all ages.

Goal 3: Add and improve parks and recreation amenities to serve a variety of age groups.	
Strategy 1	Maintain community awareness of potential and approved CIP projects, and advocate for their implementation through Heights Task Force engagement with the City.
Strategy 2	Implement the Castle Rock Park Master Plan, which includes the addition of many facilities identified by Heights residents as important in past and present Neighborhood Plan community engagement: • **Indoor multi-purpose facility.** The Community Center in the Master Plan could serve this purpose. • **Outdoor gathering space.** The Amphitheater and Market Space in the Master Plan could serve this purpose. • **Event Pavilion.** This would provide additional outdoor gathering space while also executing a 2006 Neighborhood Plan goal of developing a picnic shelter at Castle Rock Park. • **Indoor swimming pool**. Expanding swimming facilities is a longtime and ongoing goal of Heights residents. • **Multi-sport athletic facility improvements**. The Master Plan includes improvements to the large multi-purpose athletic field, a new basketball court, and a new sand volleyball court. which also contributes to implementation of 2006 Neighborhood Plan goals for multi-functional athletic facilities located adjacent to schools. • **Trails**. The Master Plan includes a trail surrounding the entire park and connecting park amenities. • **Playground.** The Master Plan includes a significant playground upgrade with the addition of climbing boulders. • **Pickleball courts.** Adjacent to existing tennis courts, the Master Plan includes several pickleball courts. Expanded vehicular parking is also proposed at both existing parking lots on Wicks Lane and Nutter Boulevard, which will support an expected increase in park visitors associated with new park amenities.
Strategy 3	Implement other facilities proposed in the Castle Rock Master Plan that are above and beyond what the community requested in the engagement survey for the past and present neighborhood plan update: • Pump track • Adult exercise equipment • Additional shelters and public art installations throughout the park
Strategy 4	Explore development of pocket parks and community gardens that can have a small footprint and be scattered throughout additional parts of the neighborhood that have less access to parks.

Goal 4: Maintain a safe and connected network of trails, parks, and other community facilities.	
Strategy 1	Implement trail projects identified in the Trail Master Plan and Long-Range Transportation Plan (see *Chapter 9 – Transportation*).
Strategy 2	In future opportunities for the neighborhood to participate in trails and other non-motorized transportation planning, identify additional trail links needed and identify priority and funding mechanisms.
Strategy 3	Regularly review and update trail, park, and community facility maps and signage, including wayfinding signage highlighting connections between different parks and community facilities.
Strategy 4	In addition to ongoing implementation of Phases I and II of the Safe Routes to School Plan (see Section 9.3.1), work with Billings Police Department and Public Works to identify other locations for potential pedestrian and traffic safety improvements or reduced speed limits around schools, parks, and other community facilities.



8.0 PUBLIC SAFETY

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8.0 PUBLIC SAFETY

8.1 Overview

The Billings Heights is served by the Billings Police Department (BPD) and Billings Fire Department (BFD), along with additional inter-agency partnerships and support throughout the county and state. Public safety and medical facilities in the Heights are shown in Figure 16.

Police

According to the BPD website as of December 2025, BPD is made up of 170 sworn police officers and other staff which are organized in the following divisions: Administration/Command, Patrol, Animal Control, Specialized Units, Support Services, and Investigations, with specialized teams and services within each division. The department headquarters are located in downtown Billings.

BPD divides the city into four response zones with designated teams of officers that balance coverage and can support each other across zones. The Heights and areas to the west that are also located above the Rimrocks are located in Response Zone A, which is in turn divided between A1 west of Main Street and A2 east of Main Street. BPD provides monthly crime reports to neighborhood task force groups, including the Heights Task Force, and residents can share safety questions and concerns with these officers.

During stakeholder engagement interviews, a BPD representative mentioned that a police sub-station in the Heights would be a useful resource for patrol staff, allowing a “landing zone” for officers to rest or do paperwork without having to go home or to the downtown headquarters.

Fire and Emergency Medical Services

According to the BFD website as of December 2025, the department has 188 personnel, including administrative personnel; operations staff including firefighters, paramedics, and EMTs; and the Prevention Bureau made up of fire marshals and other staff that focus on education, fire and life safety, code enforcement, fire investigations, and community risk reduction programs. BFD also oversees the City/County 911 Communications Center which has 37 employees.

Two of BFD’s eight stations are located in the Heights. Station #6 is located at the intersection of Wicks Lane and St. Andrews Drive, and Station #8 is located at 760 Lake Elmo Drive. Historically, Station #8 is at the original location of the fire station serving the Heights, and the location now known as Station #6 to the north was established based on past neighborhood expansion. Both stations also respond to medical emergencies. Station #6 currently houses an engine and brush truck that can respond to medical emergencies, building fires, and grass fires. A dedicated Medical Response Team operates out of Station #8, given that the strategic location can serve the Heights and Downtown with quick response times and transportation to hospital facilities in Downtown. During stakeholder engagement interviews, a BFD representative expressed the need for an additional fire station on the east side of the Heights.

As part of the FY 2027-2031 Capital Improvement Plan, parking lot drainage improvements are planned for Station #6 in 2027.

Agency Partnerships

BFD's response area includes the Billings Urban Fire Service Area (BUFSA), which extends outside of city limits. As of 2024, BFD partners with the Montana Army National Guard to provide paramedic assistance on search and rescue flight missions, and with the BPD SWAT team to provide emergency medical services in high-risk situations. New drone technology was incorporated into BFD and Montana State Regional Hazmat Response Teams operations in 2020 to assist with aerial observation on emergency scenes.

BFD contracts equipment and manpower to the State Department of Natural Resources for wildfire suppression in times of need. BFD also has mutual aid agreements with Cenex Refinery, Conoco Philips Refinery, Exxon Mobile Refinery, Lockwood Fire Department, Billings Logan International Airport Aircraft Rescue Firefighting, and the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department.

The Heights is also served by the Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services Department. Disaster and Emergency Services (D.E.S.) or Emergency Management is an integrated effort to prevent or minimize the seriousness of emergencies and disasters; and to plan and coordinate the community's response to them should they occur. It requires establishing partnerships among professional emergency management personnel to prevent, respond to, and recover from disasters. Coordination is a key factor in establishing an emergency management program, and continual improvement saves lives and reduces losses from disasters.

8.2 Neighborhood Safety Concerns

During the community engagement survey completed for this plan update, residents were asked what neighborhood characteristics are most important to them. Notably, several factors that relate to public safety were ranked among the top priorities: walkability (i.e. sidewalks, trees, street lights, etc.), safety and crime statistics, and privacy and quiet. In another question focused on transportation priorities, respondents ranked safety as the top priority.

The survey also asked questions specific to public safety perceptions and concerns. Approximately 59% of survey respondents indicated that they agree that the Heights is safe (10% strongly agree, and 49% moderately agree). Another 27% moderately disagree, and 13% strongly disagree that the Heights is safe.

When asked to assess whether they agree that the Heights is adequately served by BPD, BFD, and emergency medical services, respondents were most likely to feel fire and emergency medical services were adequate (80% and 70% agreed or moderately agreed, respectively). However, only about 54% of respondents agreed or moderately agreed that the neighborhood is adequately served by BPD.

Many residents indicated they feel the Heights has relatively low crime rates compared to some other areas in Billings, and they generally feel that the neighbors look out for each other, contributing to a safe, peaceful, and family-friendly neighborhood. However, respondents indicated a perception that crime may be increasing across Billings. When residents did express safety concerns, there were some common themes as outlined below:

- **Traffic safety issues** – In neighborhoods and especially around schools, residents have reported excessive speeding, including noise from speeding cut-through traffic, and violations such as running stop signs and red lights.

- **Inadequate lighting** – Some streets, alleys, trails, and other public spaces like parks are not well-lit. This may contribute to other concerns mentioned by residents, including theft, vandalism, drug activity, and homeless encampments. A map of street lighting in the Heights is provided in Figure 17.

- **Unsafe for walking and biking** – Largely due to inadequate lighting at night and unsafe vehicular traffic any time of day, combined with inadequate sidewalks and trails, residents reported that being a pedestrian on Main Street and in other areas does not feel safe.

Emergency responders from all City public safety departments have also noted that developments need to provide adequate access to facilitate efficient response times and maneuvering for large emergency vehicles. Subdivisions with long cul-de-sacs and minimal direct access in and out of neighborhoods make emergency access more challenging.



As the neighborhood expands, BFD is tracking areas that may need additional coverage to provide service that meets National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommended standards for incident response times. based on recommendations in the department's Operational and Administrative Analysis completed in 2021, the department recently opened additional Fire Station #8 near Lake Elmo Drive and Hansen Lane in the Heights. Still, projections suggest that significant portions of the Skyway Drive corridor, specifically from Montana Highway 3 to Alkali Creek Road, would still remain outside the NFPA-recommended response time criteria.

Areas outside city limits and BFD jurisdiction have fire protection primarily from the Fuego Volunteer Fire Department, which is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization. Compared to BFD, the volunteer department has relatively limited resources, particularly for structural fires due to lack of adequate equipment. Future development and expansion of the city limits to the west of the Heights along the Skyway Drive corridor could eventually warrant an additional fire station to expand better coverage for the northwestern part of Billings.

In general, the Heights community has a strong sense of pride and desire to maintain a neighborhood that feels safe. A combination of strategic transportation safety improvements, facilitation of public safety preparedness and response, and designing spaces with lighting and other features that make them feel safer (such as through Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles) can help address neighborhood safety concerns.

Figure 16: Fire and Medical Facilities

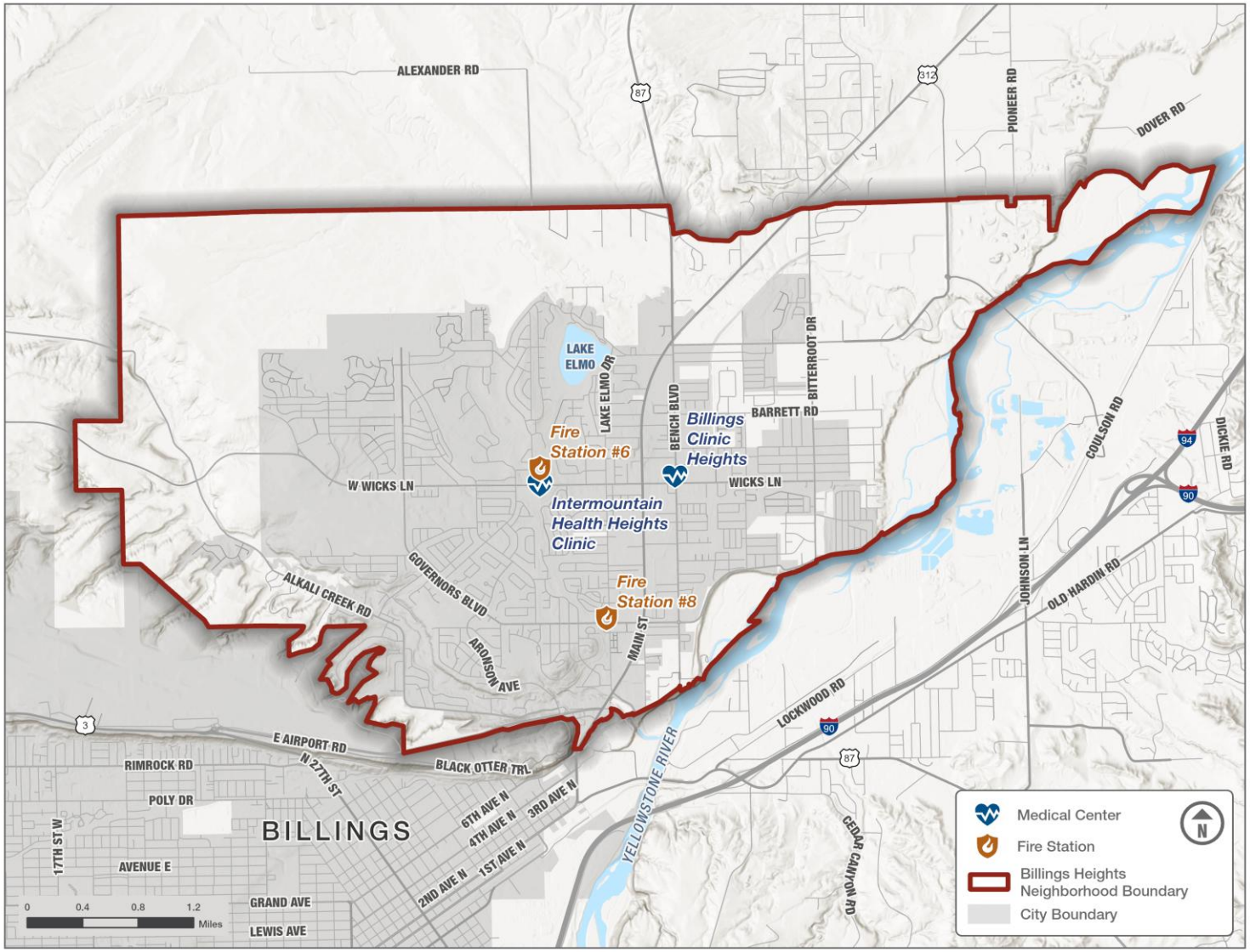
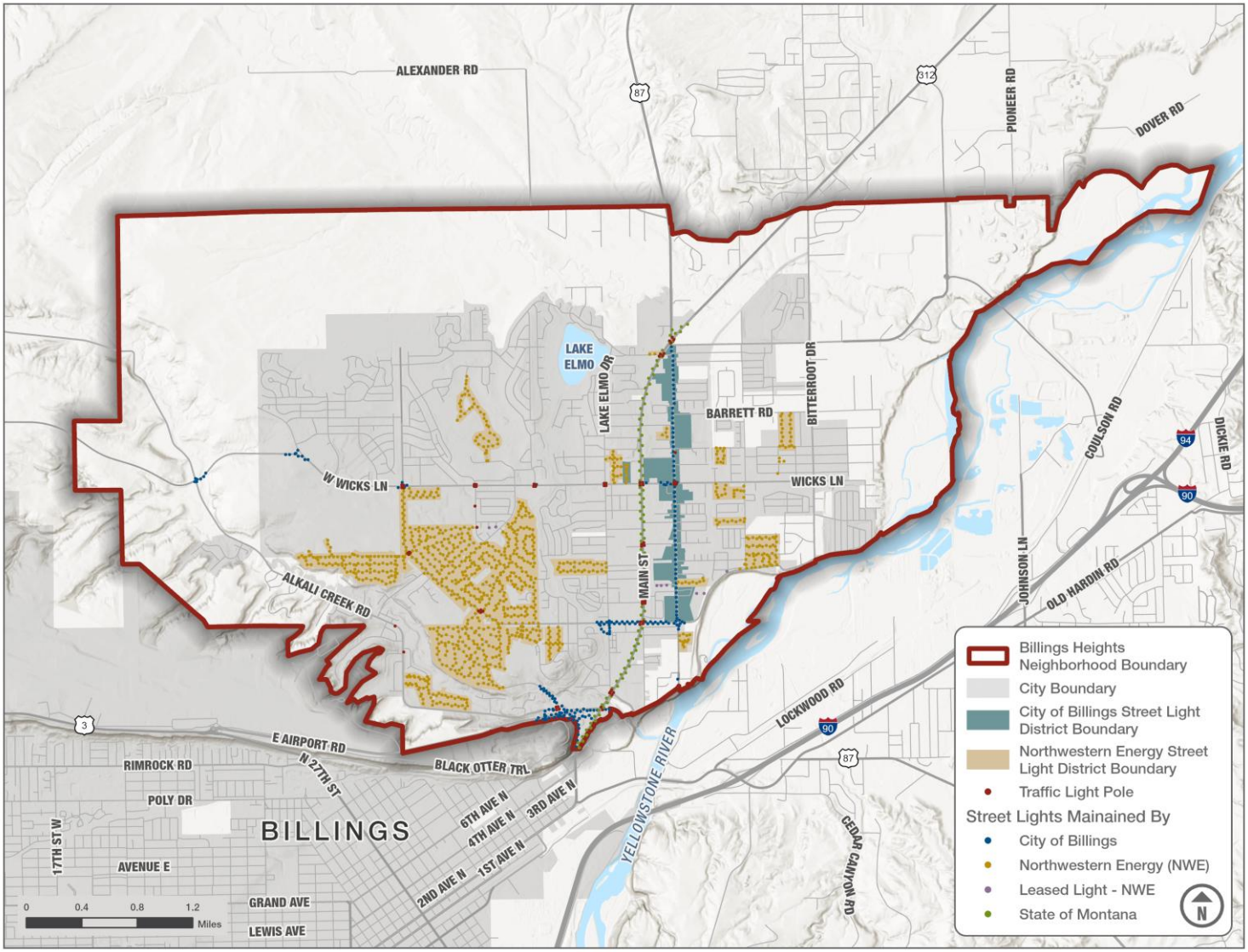


Figure 17: Street Lighting



8.3 Goals

Goal 1: Improve pedestrian safety and traffic safety and enforcement in key areas.	
Strategy 1	Continue implementation of the Safe Routes to School plan. In the future, periodically review safe routes to school (for non-motorized transportation like walking, biking, and rolling) from existing and new residential developments and subdivisions (see *Chapter 9 – Transportation*).
Strategy 2	As part of a future update to the Bikeway and Trails Master Plan, review safety of non-motorized transportation routes around parks and community facilities, as well as connections between and within neighborhoods around these public places (see *Chapter 9 – Transportation*).
Strategy 3	Continue implementation of the Public Works Engineering Division traffic calming program. In areas where a need is identified, install safety features around schools, parks, and other community facilities to discourage speeding and cut-through traffic. Neighborhood input on traffic calming should continually be gathered as part of future transportation planning efforts (see *Chapter 9 – Transportation).*
Strategy 4	Enhance police patrol for speeding and other traffic violations around school areas at school rush hour times.

Goal 2: Facilitate police, fire, and medical emergency response operations through public safety facilities, neighborhood design, and community awareness.	
Strategy 1	Plan for additional public safety facilities in the Heights in the future, including a police substation and additional fire station.
Strategy 2	Enforce code violations and obstructions of emergency access points.
Strategy 3	Monitor development on the Heights' periphery that pushes the limits of acceptable response times (such as to the neighborhood's northwest), and anticipate future need for a new or adjusted fire station location to serve these expansion areas.
Strategy 4	Continue public safety outreach efforts and crime reports with the Heights Task Force to maintain and increase community awareness of police, fire, and emergency medical response activities and other relevant public safety topics.

Goal 3: Design public spaces with adequate lighting and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.	
Strategy 1	The Heights Task Force should partner with the City and Northwestern Energy to survey street light locations and lighting conditions throughout the entire Heights neighborhood. This process can help identify locations where additional lighting is needed, as well as help track locations for reference during future maintenance and expansion of street light coverage.
Strategy 2	Promote architectural lighting and cut off lighting to enhance lighting while protecting against additional light pollution.
Strategy 3	Integrate public parks and community facilities in neighborhoods to facilitate natural surveillance by passerby and neighborhood residents (“eyes on the street”). Other than any required landscaping, limit vegetation and sight-obscuring fences, walls, or other divisions along street frontages and within parks to facilitate visual access and safety.
Strategy 4	Use clear, accessible signage, locking fences and gates, and locking doors on community facilities when needed to limit public access during certain hours.
Strategy 5	When designing any streets, parks, or other community facilities, conduct thorough outreach with people of different gender, age, race, income, ability, and other characteristics. This will help create a shared sense of community pride and ownership over these spaces that is relevant to all Heights residents, regardless of background.
Strategy 6	Using the new Citizen Problem Reporter tool available online through the Public Works website, the Heights Task Force and neighborhood residents can continue to report non-emergency maintenance issues at parks, on streets, or at other community facilities in order to facilitate faster maintenance and restoring the space to its previous condition. • The Heights Task Force and other neighborhood groups could consider establishing neighborhood clean-up and beautification events and ongoing initiatives to extend neighborhood maintenance and aesthetic benefits, while fostering greater community sense of ownership and pride. • Involve the Heights Business Association in these efforts to promote non-residential private property improvement, which may increase sense of safety along Main Street and in other non-residential areas.
Strategy 7	Encourage community-led events in public spaces during daytime and evening hours. This helps to activate spaces and create community connections.



9.0 TRANSPORTATION

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9.0 TRANSPORTATION

9.1 Overview

The natural barriers that form the boundary of the Heights can make transportation to and from the neighborhood challenging. The primarily low-density suburban development pattern, with the major auto-oriented Main Street corridor, leads many Heights residents to drive personal vehicles rather than use alternative modes like non-motorized options or public transit. As more and more people are driving on the roads in the Heights, and new connections are added to the system (the NE Billings Bypass and Skyway Drive), managing safety and traffic congestion is important to improve mobility for residents.

Key transportation issues identified in the 2006 Neighborhood Plan included:

- Traffic congestion
- Route connectivity
- Non-motorized transportation facilities
- Safety
- Planning for the future

The results of the community engagement survey for this plan update showed that safety continues to be the most significant transportation concern for residents, for all modes of transportation. Many residents had concerns about vehicular traffic congestion within the Heights, especially on major roads like Main Street and Wicks Lane, but also when traveling to and from the Heights. In general, improved safety and connectivity should be a priority based on community feedback.

This chapter of the Neighborhood Plan Update provides greater detail on the transportation system than was included in the 2006 plan, with several maps showing the current transportation system, visual representations of traffic volumes, and planned transportation projects. Focused transportation plans typically guide future transportation projects rather than comprehensive documents like this Neighborhood Plan update, so this plan provides references to other planning documents that have greater detail. The following sections summarize transportation as part of the Heights neighborhood context and focus on input from residents on changes that are important to them.

9.2 Current Transportation System

This section summarizes roadway, transit, and non-motorized components of the existing transportation system within the Heights.

9.2.1 Roadway Network

The roadway system in the Heights is planned according to a functional classification system. The functional classification refers to a road's purpose or role in the overall highway transportation system. Each classification can be tied to standards or best practices for street width, facilities for bicycles and pedestrians, driveway separation, and other characteristics that influence traffic flow.

The functional classifications of existing and future roadways are shown in Figure 18, based on the 2023 Billings Urban Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Any streets shown in gray are classified as local streets. Streets highlighted in green, orange, or red are intended to be collectors, minor arterials, or principal arterials, respectively; these are intended to handle more traffic than local streets.

As the neighborhood grows, vehicular traffic is likely to increase on many roadways; some streets that feel like “local streets” or “collectors” today may in fact be intended to play a larger role and accommodate more vehicular traffic in the future. Over time, functional classifications could shift, and improvements may be needed to provide safe access for all roadways users.

Development is likely to expand beyond the current extents of the neighborhood, at which point new collectors and arterial extensions will be needed to serve additional networks of local streets. The 2023 Billings LRTP Functional Class map illustrates potential future roadway connections. While these connections are shown in Figure 18 with dotted lines to indicate their general location, the exact alignments are conceptual and subject to refinement as developments come in and are evaluated through the City and County subdivision regulations.

The following descriptions summarize the role of each classification of roadway in the transportation system, with a few examples from the Heights:

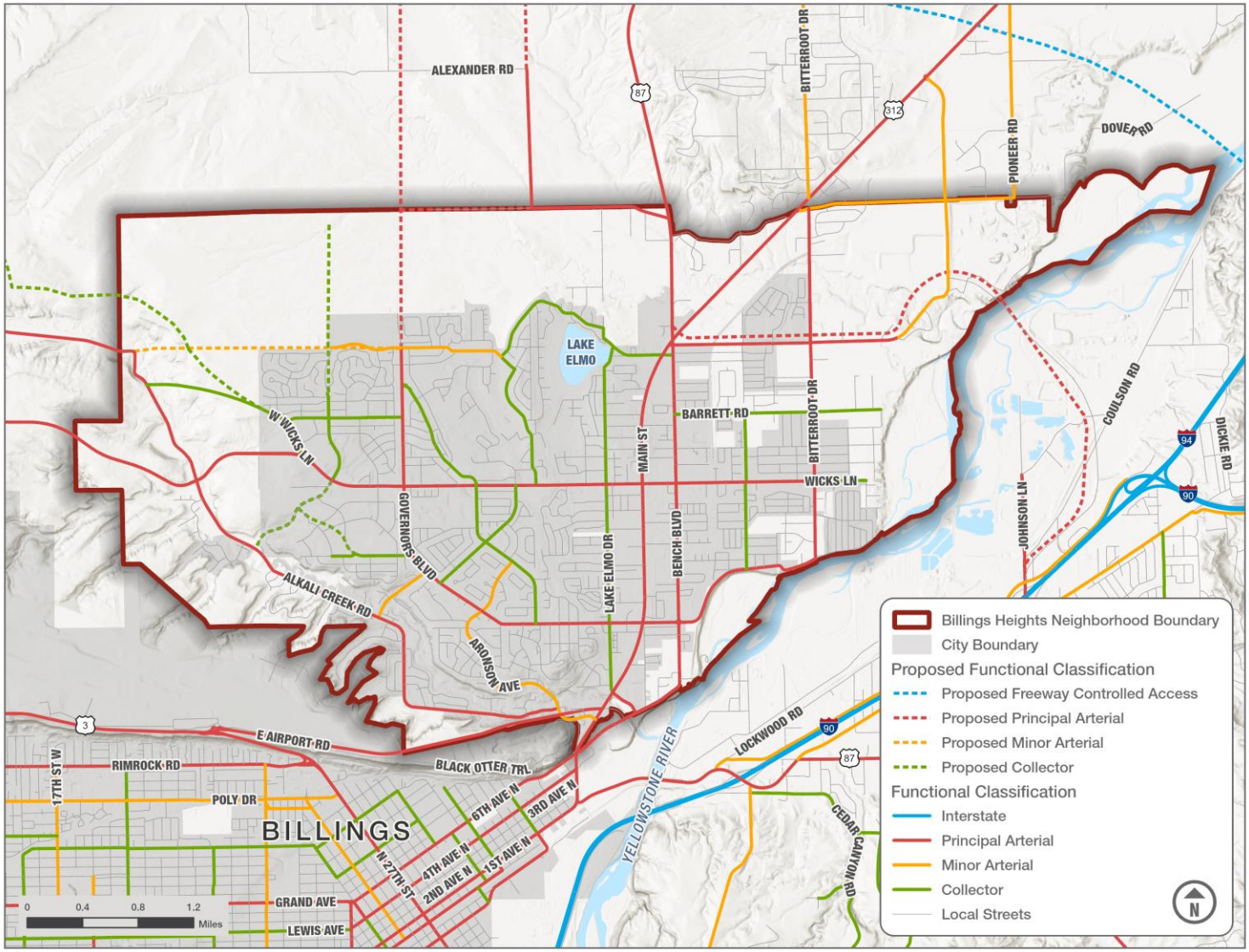
Interstates / Freeways – Highways meant for high speeds and long travel distances, with minimal access points. Freeways typically have interchanges rather than stoplights. There are no interstates or freeways in the Heights. *(Shown in blue in Figure 18)*

Arterials – Major roadways intended to serve large amounts of traffic at high speeds. There are usually minimal stoplights or driveway access points on more recent arterials. Pedestrians and bicycles are ideally served on sidewalks, paths, and/or bike lanes that are separated from vehicular traffic (such as with a strip of landscaping or some other barrier). Arterials are split into “principal” and “minor” arterials. Examples of Heights principal arterials include Main Street, Wicks Lane, Gleneagles Boulevard, and Governors Boulevard. Minor arterials include Aronson Avenue, Annandale Road, and 5 Mile Road. Additional principal and minor arterials are shown in Figure 18. Several of these roadways may currently function as lower-traffic neighborhood streets, but they are intended and designed to carry more vehicles at higher speeds as more growth and development bring higher traffic volumes. *(Shown in red and orange in Figure 18)*

Collectors – This is an intermediate functional classification. These roads collect traffic from smaller neighborhood streets (“local” streets) to link them to arterials. There may be more driveway access points and stoplights or stop signs on collectors; speeds are typically lower than on arterials. Pedestrians and bicycles should be provided with sidewalks and bike lanes, which may or may not be separated from vehicular traffic. Examples of Heights collectors include Lake Elmo Drive, Hawthorne Lane, Nutter Boulevard, and Lake Hills Drive. Additional collectors are shown in Figure 18. Several of these roadways may currently function as lower-traffic neighborhood streets, but they are intended and designed to carry more vehicles at higher speeds as more growth and development bring higher traffic volumes. *(Shown in green in Figure 18)*

Local Streets – This is the lowest functional classification. These streets are intended to provide access within residential neighborhoods and business areas at relatively low speeds. Local streets have more driveway access points and are typically designed to discourage vehicles cutting through. In the past, local streets may not have included sidewalks, but sidewalks are now required for all developments. Bicycles share these relatively quiet roadways with vehicular traffic. *(Shown in gray in Figure 18)*

Figure 18: Street Functional Classifications



Vehicular Traffic

Figure 19 on the following page shows Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) Counts, based on 2024 data collected by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Vehicular traffic counts were collected at each site shown with a blue dot. The color and line weight of each roadway segment shows the quantity of vehicles passing through per day, on average based on the traffic counts.

While data was not collected for all roadways (including Skyway Drive, which opened since these traffic counts were collected), this map provides useful insight into roadways that are experiencing the highest traffic volumes. Traffic volumes can inform decisions on site and roadway design, such as number of travel lanes or intersection and driveway design. If a roadway is serving a high traffic volume but experiencing significant delays and/or safety concerns, this data could help support the need for infrastructure improvement projects in the future.

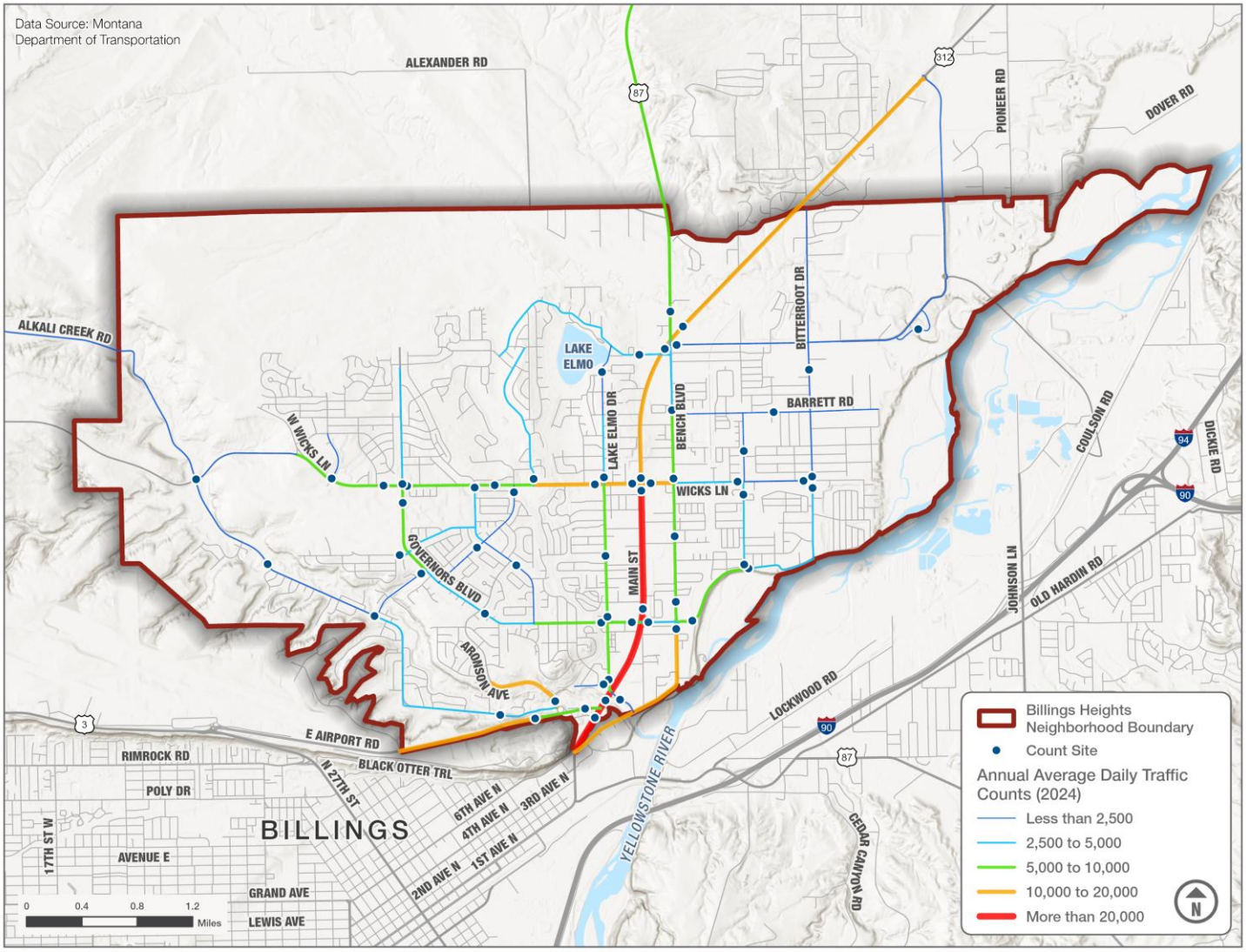
Throughout the planning process, many residents indicated concerns about traffic congestion within the Heights, especially on major roadways like Main Street, Wicks Lane, and Governors Boulevard, and at peak times like school drop-off and pick-up. The intersections of Wicks Lane with High Sierra Boulevard and Fantan Street were specifically flagged as traffic bottlenecks. Residents are interested in greater connectivity throughout the neighborhood and potential additional roundabouts or traffic signals to help manage congestion, especially given that the neighborhood population continues to grow.

Beyond congestion, residents suggested that speeding and cut-through traffic are creating safety issues, especially for people traveling by non-motorized modes (walking, biking, rolling, etc.)

As one might predict, Figure 19 shows that Main Street is the highest traffic roadway in the Heights. Other roadways with higher traffic are portions of Wicks Lane, Aronson Avenue, and Bench Boulevard. Based on functional classifications shown in Figure 18 and the addition of Skyway Drive and the Billings Bypass, changes in traffic patterns may occur, though MDT data from 2023 shown in Figure 19 does not include traffic counts for newer roadways. (2024 data also became available during this planning process, but it still does not include counts on Skyway Drive or significant changes to traffic on adjacent streets.)

Comparing Figures 18 and 19, current and future principal arterials that may be intended to eventually handle greater traffic than they do currently include Alkali Creek Road, portions of Bench Boulevard and Wicks Lane, Governors Boulevard, Mary Street, and Bitterroot Drive. Given resident concerns about traffic congestion, further study may be needed to determine if any modifications are needed to the roadway network to better accommodate traffic. This could include widening streets or other improvements to give people more route options than having to take the busiest roads. As both Skyway Drive and the Billings Bypass become integrated into the roadway network, it will be interesting to monitor any changes in vehicular traffic patterns.

Figure 19: Vehicular Traffic Counts (2024)



9.2.2 Transit Network

Promoting transit ridership can be a way to ease vehicular traffic on roadways in the area. MET Transit provides public transportation to the Billings area. The Heights is currently served by three bus routes within the MET network, as shown in Figure 20.

MET staff shared insights about Heights transit ridership and potential future changes they are considering, including the exploration of a new Heights Transfer Center and route changes. Historically, more routes were provided that served the student population. However, much of the Heights is low density housing, so it is challenging to provide adequate service. Infill development and new development could influence future transit route decisions.

Changes to the roadway system including Skyway Drive and the Billings Bypass will need to be considered as Billings continues to grow and expand. Currently, service is only provided within city limits, but this could change over time as more areas are annexed. Staff noted that MET engagement is necessary to ensure roadway design projects consider and can accommodate transit.

Route 16 – Heights Rapid Service: This route provides frequent service (every 30 mins.) between the downtown transit center, the Heights commercial area along Main Street, and surrounding relatively dense residential areas along Lake Elmo Road. MET staff indicated that this route has the highest ridership. Many people use the route to access employment, shopping, healthcare, and schools. MET sees potential to increase the frequency of service on Route 16, which may be helpful in the busy commercial area along Main Street, but pedestrian improvements are needed.

Route 18 – Heights Circulator: This route extends out into the Heights from the rapid service area, providing connections between other residential, commercial, and school areas in the neighborhood. Route 18 typically has a 60-minute frequency, but the route runs every 30 minutes during morning and afternoon peak hours to support student transportation.

Community Feedback

In the community engagement survey, 95% of respondents indicated that they do not use MET Transit. Many indicated that they do not feel they have a need to use transit, but there were several ideas for things that might make people more likely to use transit.

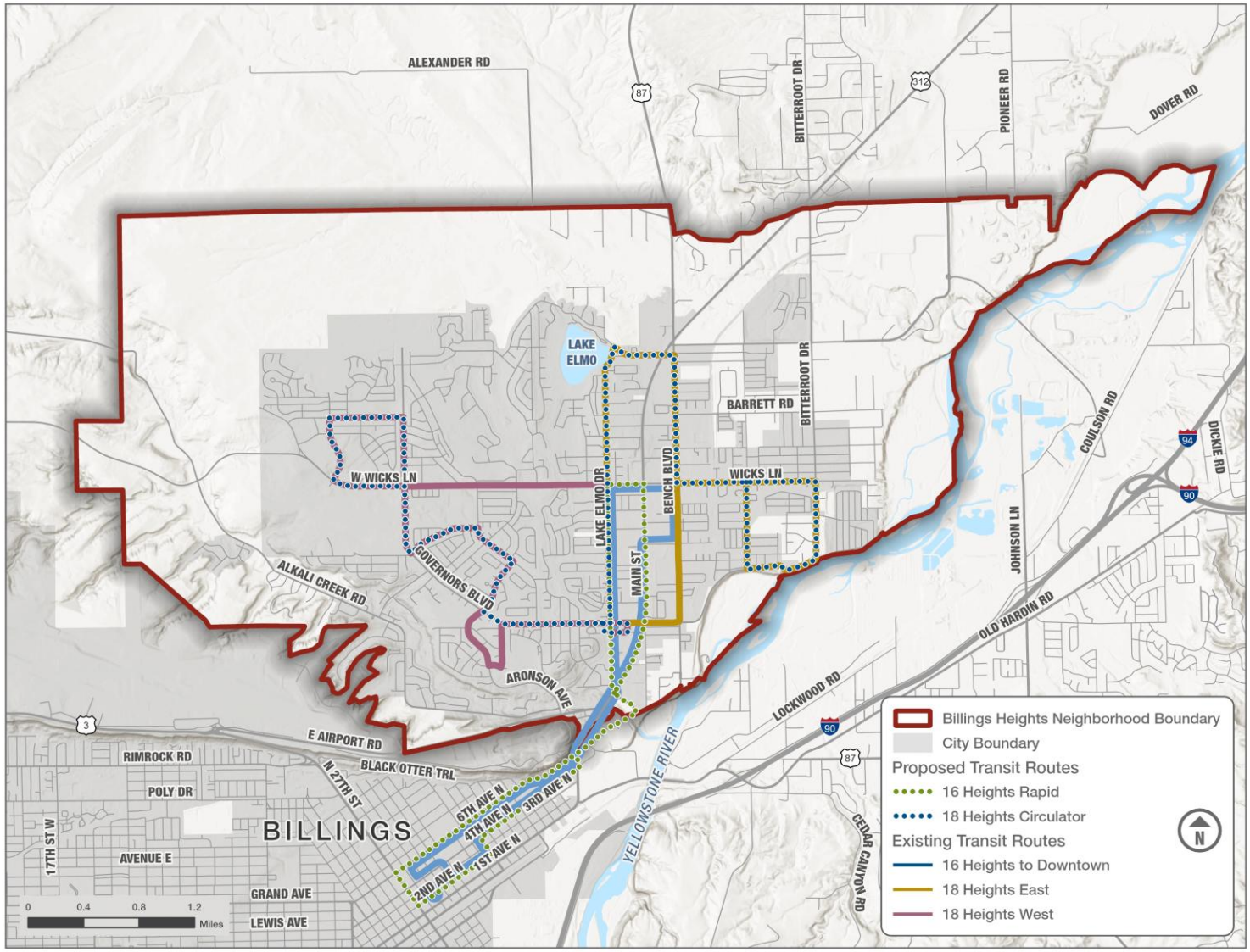
Schedule and Frequency: Many commented that more frequent service would make transit more appealing. There is already a rapid and frequent connection with 30-minute headways between the Heights and downtown Billings, but some survey respondents indicated the service times don't align with their work hours or routines, or does not run late enough into the evening.

Stop and Route Locations: Much of the neighborhood is located far from existing transit routes and stops, such as in northern and southwestern areas of the Heights. Some people noted that the proposed Heights Transfer Center would be helpful.

Destinations: Downtown is a popular transit destination from the Heights, but approximately 30% of respondents indicated that they are interested in a direct connection between the Heights and the West End. Respondents also noted that driving is more flexible when they are trying to go to multiple destinations in one trip.

Safety and Usability: Some survey respondents reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable riding the bus. Others felt that routes and available information such as the MET app were not intuitive and they did not feel confident using the service; some people suggested that more education and awareness would help more people feel comfortable riding transit in Billings. Providing more shelters at bus stops could also improve the experience.

Figure 20: Public Transit Network



9.2.3 Non-Motorized Transportation

The non-motorized transportation system includes sidewalks, pathways, bike lanes, and other facilities that are dedicated to pedestrians and bicyclists, as shown in Figure 21.

Nearly half (46%) of community engagement survey responses indicated that they regularly use non-motorized modes of transportation, but most of these residents indicated that improvements are needed such as accessibility, more connection within the network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and maintenance. Another 19% of responses indicated that they do not currently use non-motorized transportation but would be more likely to do so if improvements were made. Many Heights residents expressed interest in walking and biking more in the Heights, but the current non-motorized transportation routes do not always feel safe.

Some areas lack continuous sidewalks (such as Wicks Lane between Hawthorne Lane and Bitterroot Drive), and there is a desire for additional bike lanes (such as on Mary Street), separated pathways (such as along the Billings Bypass), and generally a more connected trail network. Bicyclists would feel safer if bike lanes were protected from vehicles, such as with a painted buffer or by placing on-street parking between bike lanes and the rest of the road. Residents would like to see crosswalk and lighting improvements to improve safety. Some survey respondents note that they feel comfortable using trails and quiet neighborhood streets to get around while walking or biking, but safety improvements are especially needed on busier roads and around schools. Note: Some of the missing sidewalks and other roadway infrastructure is the result of previously developed County parcels being annexed into the City limits.

New technology tools such as Replica software can help local governments like Billings and transportation agencies like MDT track pedestrian and bicyclist trips. This data can be used to help understand and map where people tend to travel by non-motorized modes like walking and biking, in a similar way to how vehicular traffic volumes are shown in Figure 19. Pedestrian and bicyclist volumes were collected from Replica data to determine routes that experience the greatest and least pedestrian and bicyclist traffic. The data is shown as heat maps in Figures 22 and 23.

A high concentration of non-motorized activity can either suggest that people are comfortable with the route or that the route is needed by many people and should be improved. Conversely, low concentration of non-motorized activity in an area where it would otherwise be expected (based on higher density development or destinations like schools and shopping) may highlight areas that need improvements before more people will feel safe using these routes.

As shown in Figure 22, pedestrian activity is greatest on segments of Main Street, Wicks Lane, and Hilltop Road (shown in the darkest, boldest red). Other streets that tend to have higher pedestrian traffic include sections of Constitution Avenue, Declaration Avenue, Shamrock Lane, Nutter Boulevard, Babcock Boulevard, and a few others. Peripheral areas tend to see under 30 people walking per day (shown in yellow or light orange). These patterns may evolve as new roads are built and the neighborhood expands outward.

As shown in Figure 23, cycling activity is much more limited in the Heights. Main Street has very little bicycle traffic, and cyclists appear to choose other north-south routes such as Lake Elmo Drive, Bench Boulevard, or the Kiwanis Trail. Other common bicycle traffic areas include Governors Boulevard, Aronson Avenue, and a few limited sections on Wicks Lane.

Figure 21: Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities (2023 LRTP)

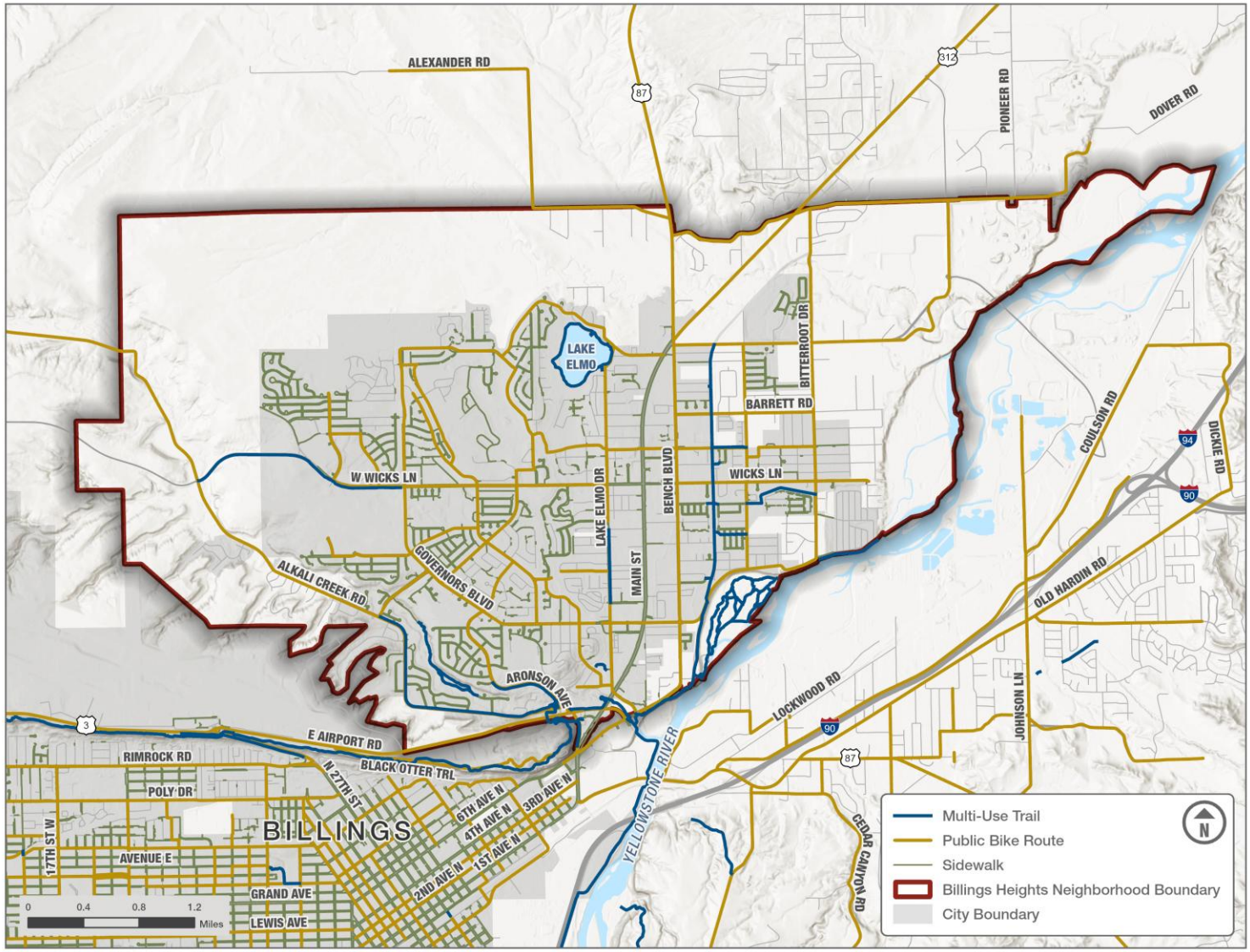


Figure 22: Pedestrian Volume (2024 Estimate)

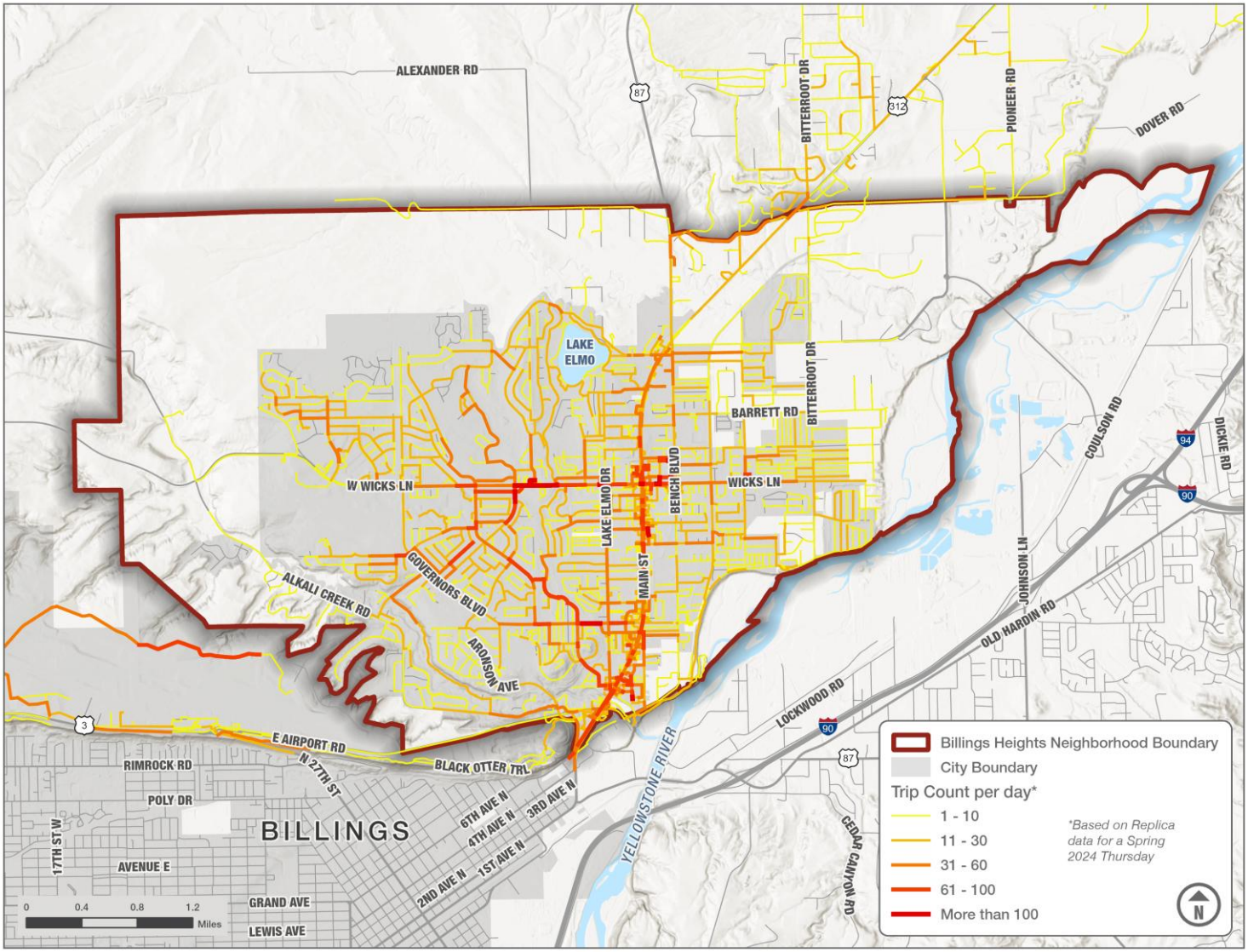
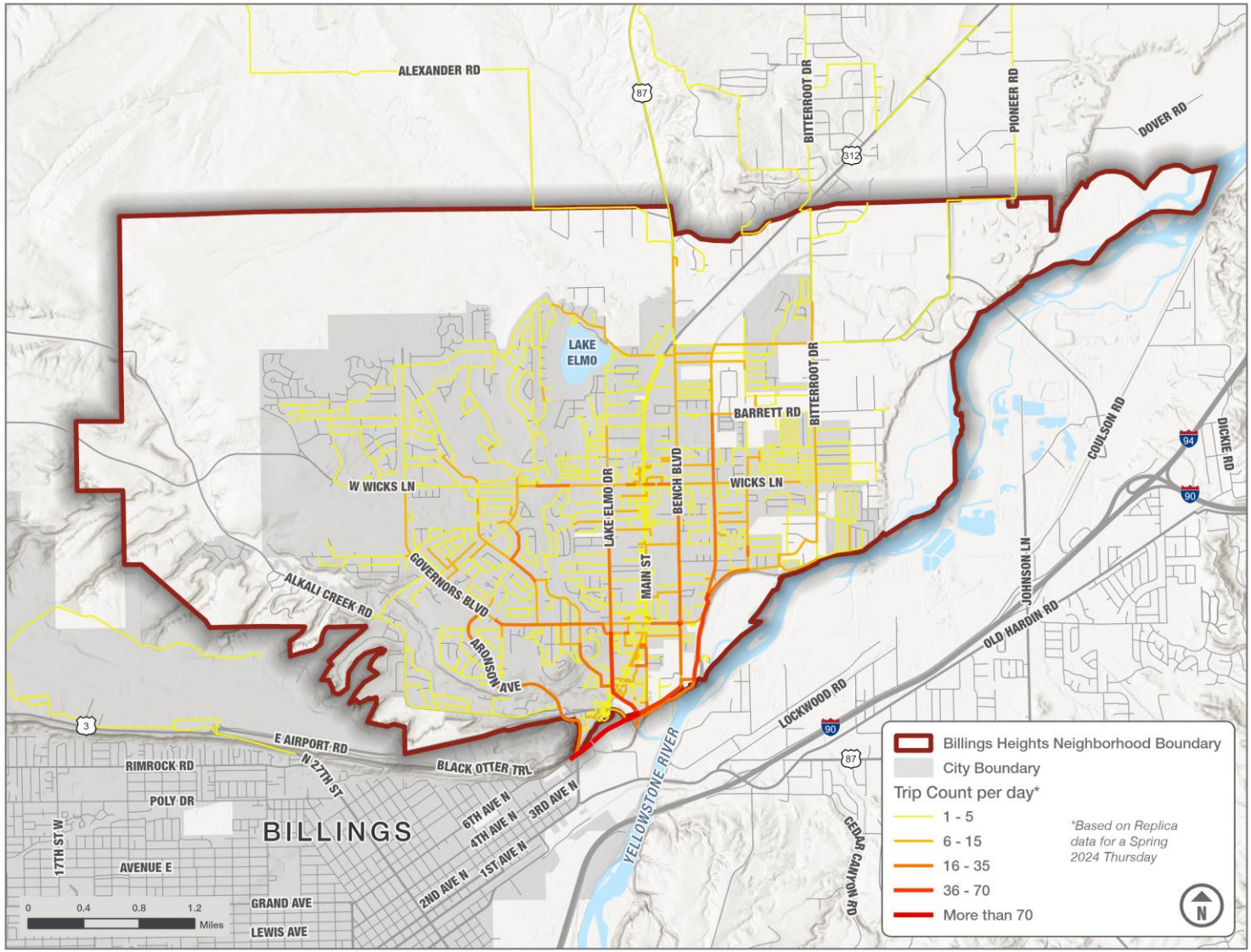


Figure 23: Bicycle Volume (2024 Estimate)



9.3 Future Transportation Network

This section summarizes roadway, transit, and non-motorized components of the future transportation system within the Heights. As stated earlier in this chapter, dedicated transportation plans and policies provide more detail on transportation patterns and proposed future projects. The purpose of this section is to provide a high-level summary of relevant transportation plans and policies as they relate to the Billings Heights.

9.3.1 Plan and Policy Review

The following transportation plans and policies were reviewed as part of this Neighborhood Plan Update:

- 2023 Billings Urban Area Long Range Transportation Plan *(Including elements of the 2016 Billings Area Bikeway and Trails Master Plan Update which were carried forward in the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)).*
- Billings Bypass Corridor Study (2023)
- Inner Belt Loop Corridor Study (2020)
- Billings MET Transit Development Plan (2022)
- Billings Safe Routes to School Plan Update (2022)
- Billings Safe Routes to School Plan Update: Phase 2 (2024)
- Complete Streets Policy (updated 2016)
- City of Billings Complete Streets Progress Report (2020)

Summary descriptions of the purpose and content of each plan are provided in Table 20 below, along with a high-level summary of projects, recommendations, and key takeaways from each plan as they relate to the Billings urban area and specifically the Heights. Some recommended projects have now been implemented.

9.3.2 Proposed Transportation Projects

As shown in Table 20, many of the relevant transportation plans have been updated in the last five years. Each plan includes analysis of existing transportation systems that serve the region, including the Heights, as well as recommendations for future transportation projects that could improve safety and mobility.

As the city continues to grow, the role of the MPO is critical to these efforts so that they consider a regional approach. The MPO's most overarching plan is the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which was updated in 2023 and has a planning horizon of 2045 (the same as this Neighborhood Plan Update). In the spring of 2025, the MPO adopted an amendment to the 2023 LRTP that refined the project list as well as updated the MPO Planning Area. In the LRTP Amendment, the MPO has created an interactive Billings MPO LRTP Projects Dashboard site. In addition to the interactive map, the Billings MPO updated the planning boundary to reflect urbanized areas identified in the 2020 Decennial Census.

The 2023 LRTP compiles transportation recommendations from previous plans. The needs, deficiencies, opportunities, and roadway and non-motorized projects identified in the LRTP are shown in Figures 24 through 26. Additional detail about each proposed project identified in the maps is included in the 2023 LRTP. As additional plans continue to be developed and adopted following the LRTP and this Neighborhood Plan Update, residents and organizations in the Heights can play a role in ongoing support for projects impacting the neighborhood.

Table 19: Transportation Plan and Policy Review

Plan	Description	Projects / Recommendations / Key Takeaways
Billings Urban Area Long Range Transportation Plan (Billings-Yellowstone County MPO, 2023) ***(Related plan: Billings Area Bikeway and Trails Master Plan Update, 2017)***	This is a multimodal transportation plan that guides transportation planning projects for the Billings area through the year 2045. The plan inventories past plans, existing transportation infrastructure, and other existing conditions and trends in order to forecast future transportation needs, deficiencies, and opportunities (see Figure 23). The LRTP makes recommendations on future project priorities and is continually referenced when allocating local infrastructure funding and/or applying for funding from federal and state sources. *The 2023 LRTP carries forward the goals and objectives from the Billings Area Bikeway and Trails Master Plan Update, adopted in 2017. This plan identifies needs and deficiencies for non-motorized transportation, and the projects it recommends are included in the 2023 LRTP. Notable goals and projects include expanding bikeway and path facilities, specific locations for safety improvements, and ongoing Complete Streets implementation.*	• Discussion of the Inner Belt Loop and Billings Bypass projects and their anticipated impact on future average daily traffic and intersection levels of service. • Future MET transit system redesign to improve service in the Heights. • Regional goals for improving safety for all modes, along with resiliency, mobility, equity and accessibility, and economic vitality. • Regional goals for expanding bikeways and shared-use trails and prioritizing their inclusion in major roadway design projects. • Specific roadway improvement, congestion management, and intersection improvement projects (see Figure 24). • Specific recommendations for neighborhood bikeways, bike lanes, trails, sidewalks, crossings, and Safe Routes to School in the Heights (see Figure 25).

Table 19: Transportation Plan and Policy Review

Plan	Description	Projects / Recommendations / Key Takeaways
Billings Bypass Corridor Study (Billings-Yellowstone County MPO, 2023)	This study provides an assessment of various impacts of the new Billings Bypass roadway connection. This includes roadway and traffic considerations, but it also extends beyond transportation topics to provide analysis of land use, utility infrastructure, environmental, and other topics. In anticipation of future growth along the new Bypass corridor, the study provides recommendations to guide future development in the area.	• Discussion of the Billings Bypass project and how it will provide an alternative connection to the Heights from the east, and its future impact on regional traffic, such as relieving Main Street of some congestion from commuter and freight traffic. Also discusses non-motorized facilities as part of this project. • Examine development that could occur in the northeast corner of the Heights, such as new commercial town center and a mix of housing including higher-density workforce housing and potential for ground-floor commercial. Also discusses utility extensions that would be needed to serve this development. • Consideration of the new Yellowstone River crossing and roadway entrance to the neighborhood as a gateway that should be aesthetically pleasing and emphasize Dover Park and other natural features.
Inner Belt Loop Corridor Study (Billings-Yellowstone County MPO, 2020)	This study provides analysis of a range of anticipated impacts from the Inner Belt Loop project, which had been under discussion and the subject of multiple plans for decades. The report includes consideration of transportation and traffic as well as land use, utilities, and other topics related to development that could occur along the new roadway corridor. This information was in part used to help inform the final roadway design and construction.	• Discussion of the Inner Belt Loop project that will provide a connection between the Heights and the West End, and its future impact on traffic volumes and the function of key intersections such as the Zimmerman Trail roundabout and the intersection with Alkali Creek Road. Also addresses the multi-use path along the corridor and crossing safety considerations. • Provides scenarios for future growth including primarily residential development with potential for some commercial at major intersections, along with discussion of utility extensions that would be needed. • Future planning for the area will be needed, especially given its location primarily outside city limits. The Limits of Annexation may need to be adjusted, and a land use plan could ultimately help guide development along the corridor to have a cohesive look and feel in relationship to the roadway.

Table 19: Transportation Plan and Policy Review

Plan	Description	Projects / Recommendations / Key Takeaways
Transit Development Plan (Billings MET Transit, 2022)	This plan utilizes demographic information and data about vehicle ownership and residential and employment density in Billings to assess public transportation needs in the area. This is used to inform potential changes to MET's transit service such as expanding service or introducing new routes in areas that are most likely to generate the highest transit ridership.	• Provides recommendations for redesigning bus routes in the Heights, providing maps and discussion of the Heights Rapid Service (Route 16) and Heights Circulator (Route 18). • The new Route 16 would be shorter than routes currently traveling between downtown and the Heights and provide the opportunity for fast and frequent (every 30 minutes) trips from The Heights to downtown Billings, and connections to the rest of the city via downtown transfers. • Route 18 would change into a bidirectional "circulator" route that travels through the Heights and connects to Route 16. Service would be provided with 60-minute headways, increasing frequency to every 30 minutes during school peaks.
Billings Safe Routes to School Plan Update (Billings-Yellowstone County MPO, 2022)	This plan built on previous Safe Routes to School (SRTS) efforts in Billings, continuing with the goal of increasing safety and accessibility for students going to and from school by active transportation modes such as walking and bicycling. The plan identifies existing issues and provides recommendations for infrastructure improvements and policy/programmatic changes. The goal is to improve safety and accessibility of non-motorized routes to school, which in turn is expected to increase the number of students traveling to school by these modes.	• Provides walking route maps for all public elementary schools in Billings, including Alkali Creek, Beartooth, Bench, Bitterroot, Eagle Cliffs, and Sandstone. • Highlights major roadways in the Heights where residents feel there are speeding and other traffic safety concerns, like Wicks Lane, Governors Boulevard, and Alkali Creek Road. • Identifies areas that are missing sidewalks and/or other non-motorized infrastructure needed to provide safe routes. Also notes intersections that need crossing improvements for safety. • All elementary schools identify potential safety improvements, which are categorized as high, medium, and low impact projects. Changes needed to Alkali Creek, Sandstone, and Bench rank within the top ten high-impact projects identified citywide. • Several projects were already in the process of being implemented at the time of the plan update.

Table 19: Transportation Plan and Policy Review

Plan	Description	Projects / Recommendations / Key Takeaways
Billings Safe Routes to School Plan Update: Phase 2 (Billings-Yellowstone County MPO, 2024)	This plan further expands on the SRTS program. Phase 1 only included public elementary schools in Billings, and Phase 2 includes public middle schools and county and other private schools within the MPO. The purpose is similar to that of Phase 1 – it seeks to encourage non-motorized ways of getting to school by identifying safety issues and recommending projects to address them.	• Provides walking route maps for most schools included in the Phase 2 update, including Castle Rock and Medicine Crow Middle Schools and Independent Elementary (Yellowstone County). • Highlights traffic safety concerns around the schools included in this phase, including the possibility to reinstate reduced speed school zones around middle schools. • To ease traffic congestion related to school drop-off, the plan suggests offsite locations that provide non-motorized connection, like drop-off at Castle Rock Park next to Castle Rock Middle School. • Identifies areas that need improvements to sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure like protected bike lanes and shared use paths, and/or crossings. • Identifies specific improvements needed for each of the three Heights schools included in this phase, categorized by high, medium, and low impact projects.

Table 19: Transportation Plan and Policy Review

Plan	Description	Projects / Recommendations / Key Takeaways
Complete Streets Policy (City of Billings, updated 2016) ***(Related reports:*** ***City of Billings Complete Streets Progress Report 2020;*** ***Complete Streets Economic Analysis 2026)***	Per the 2016 update to the City's Complete Streets Policy (originally adopted in 2011), "Complete Streets is a transportation and design approach that requires streets to be planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages, abilities regardless of their mode of transportation." The policy requires that every street project in the City incorporates Complete Streets principles and seeks to create a safe and connected multi-modal transportation network, although only collector and arterial streets require a presentation to the City Council to review incorporation of Complete Streets Elements.	• References the National Complete Streets Coalition definition of Complete Streets elements, which includes sidewalks, bicycle lanes, shared-use paths, designated transit lanes, safe and accessible transit stops, and safe crossings for pedestrians (including median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, and curb extensions). • Ties in with the 2017 Bikeway and Trails Master Plan, recommending the projects that would go on to be outlined in that plan be implemented. • Provides a project checklist along with guidance for implementation, including incorporating elements into the design process, assessing cost and maintenance needs, consideration of neighborhood context and priorities, balancing user needs, and presentation of alternatives to local government and the public. • The 2020 Progress Report highlights projects that were implemented and opportunities to expand implementation in the future.

Figure 24: Needs, Deficiencies, and Opportunities (2023 LRTP)

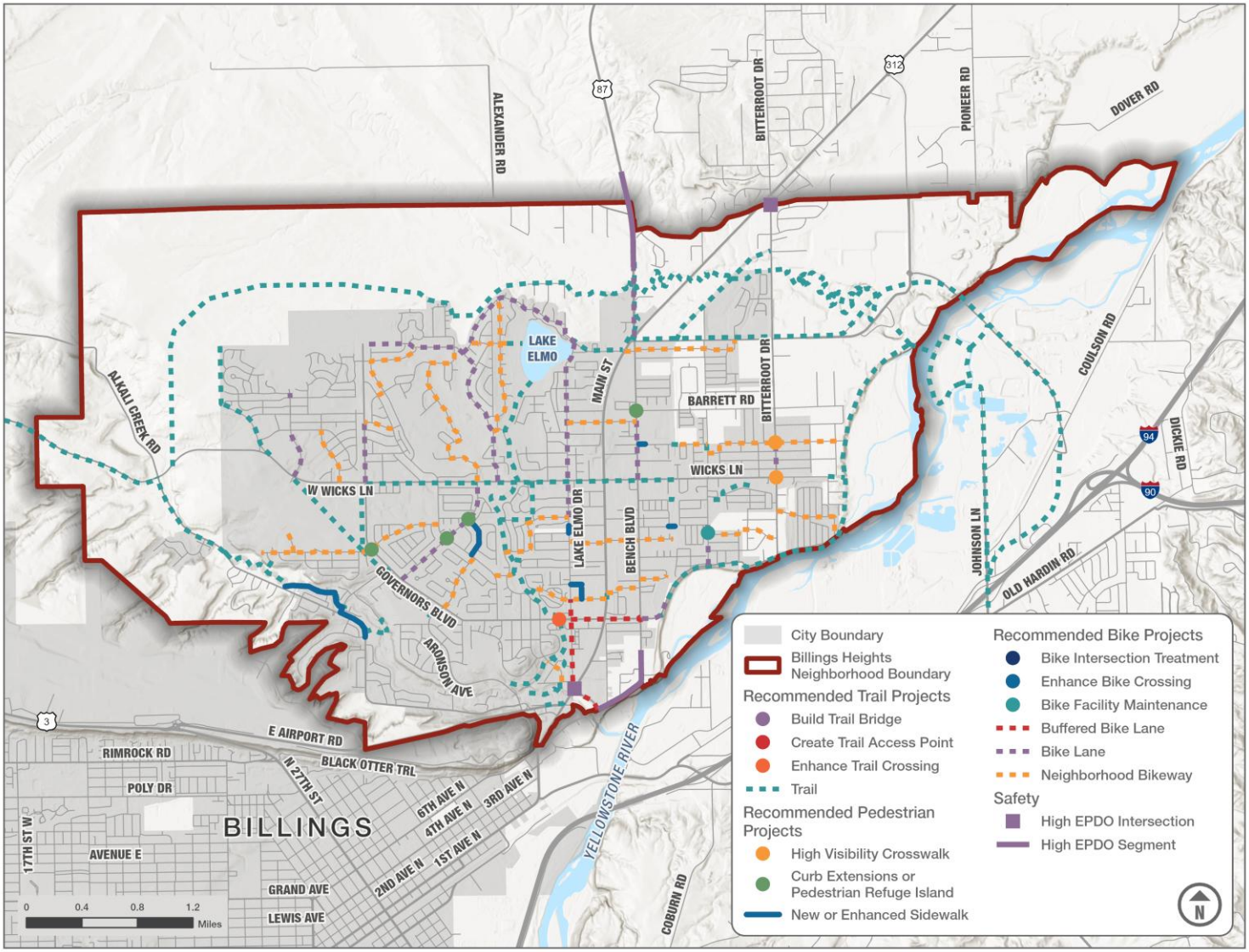


Figure 25: Planned Road Transportation Projects (2023 LRTP)

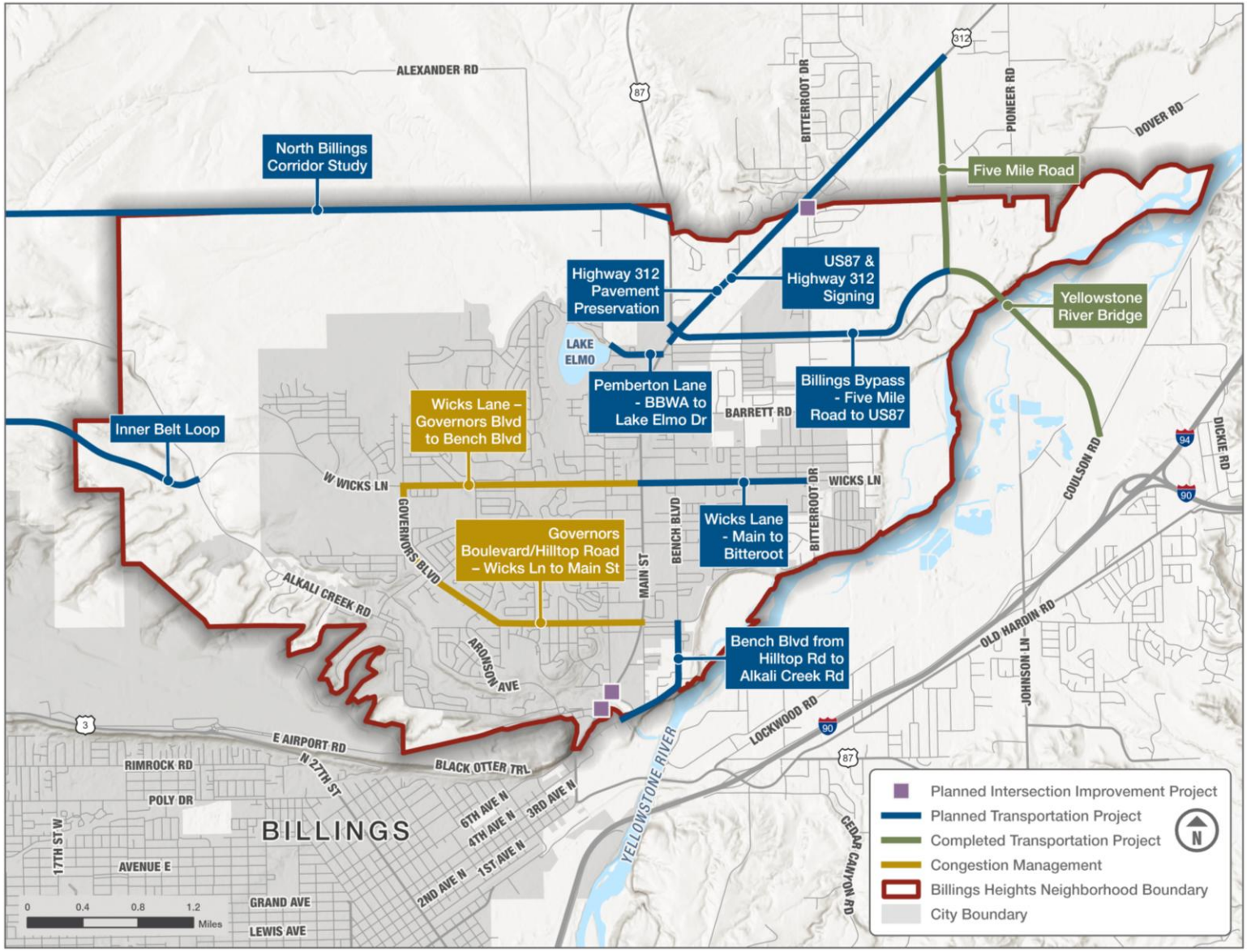
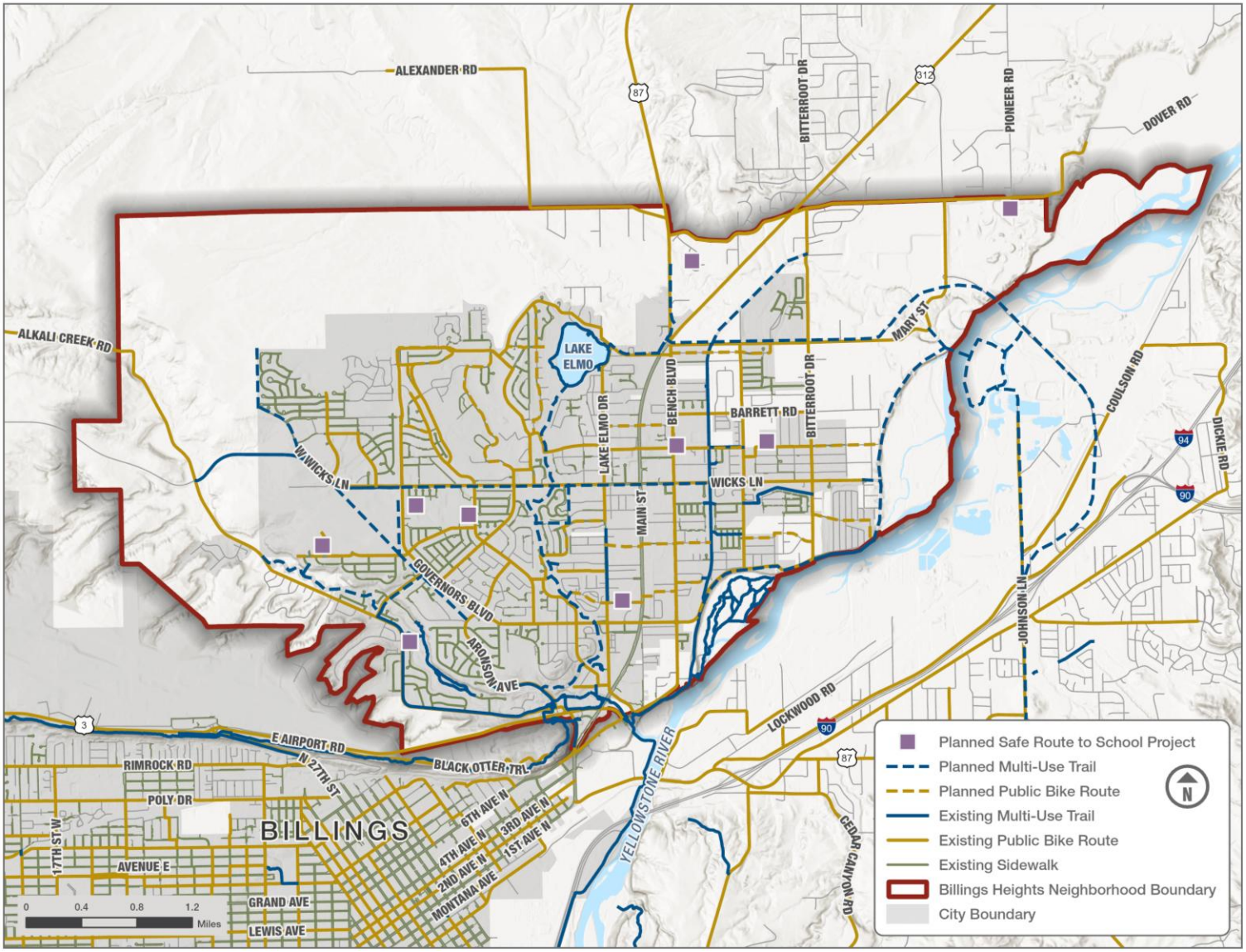


Figure 26: Planned Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities (2023 LRTP)



9.3.3 Funding Transportation Projects

The City of Billings CIP, adopted in December 2025, includes several transportation projects in the Heights for fiscal years 2027 to 2031. These projects have committed funding from various sources as outlined in the more detailed CIP document available online at the City of Billings website.

Earlier in 2025, the MDT also approved their 2025 to 2029 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, which also outlines committed funding for selected transportation projects.

Projects that are located in the Heights from both the City of Billings CIP and the MDT STIP are summarized in Table 21 below.

In addition to the projects listed in Table 21, there are many other transportation projects that are recommended by transportation plans prepared by the City and MPO. The project priorities identified in these plans and ongoing agency and public involvement discussions determine which projects move forward with committed funding and anticipated construction years, as outlined in the CIP, MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and STIP.

Table 20: Funded Transportation Projects (CIP FY2027-2031)

Proposed CIP / STIP Project	Description *(Justification)*	Estimate Fiscal Year	Estimated Cost
CIP FY 2027-2031 (construction is in the Future Projects List): **Alkali Creek Trail Connection**	This project would extend the trail from Swords Park at Main Street tunnel along Alkali Creek to the Aronson Connection Trail just east of Aronson Bridge. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will be conducting a feasibility study on this trail during the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) '26. This study will help determine trail alignment, risks, possible maintenance costs, and planning level construction costs. This will inform the project further. Non-profit Billings TrailNet has also donated $10,000 towards the design of this trail.	2027 2029	$30,000 $460,000
CIP FY 2027-2031: **Wicks Lane - Hawthorne Lane to Bitterroot Road**	This project funds the design and the reconstruction of Wicks Lane and construction of sidewalks. *Wicks Lane is an arterial that carries a volume of traffic that would be more efficient and safe if the road was reconstructed as a three-lane section with multimodal facilities. Bitterroot Road connects to Wicks Lane and needs to be improved as well due to the development that has occurred in the area. Sidewalks and a small section of Wicks Lane west of Hawthorne Lane were constructed in FY22 to improve pedestrian access and other improvements will be constructed in FY27.*	2027 2028	$380,000 $3,220,000

Table 20: Funded Transportation Projects (CIP FY2027-2031)

Proposed CIP / STIP Project	Description *(Justification)*	Estimate Fiscal Year	Estimated Cost
CIP FY 2027-2031: **Heights Transfer Center**	This project is for a Heights area fixed-route transfer center with passenger shelters and restroom, an operator break area and restroom, an office area, vehicle/equipment storage, and a security camera system. MET is currently investigating the feasibility of using existing City owned land in the heights as a potential location. The project includes all real estate, engineering and design fees, labor, equipment, materials, and administrative costs. *MET Transit has identified the need for a Heights transfer location to facilitate transfer of passengers between heights circulator routes and routes connecting elsewhere in the City; further, MET has need of a location for operators to utilize restroom and break facilities. MET also anticipates the need for potential vehicle storage at the location to reduce the amount of daily deadhead miles operated by the MET fleet.*	2027	$3,175,000
CIP FY 2027-2031: **Aronson to Annandale**	This project would consist of a shared use path from Aronson Avenue to Annandale Road. Much of the shared use path would be located on land owned by the City of Billings. Some of the project would require coordination with the State of Montana. The total length of the project would be more than 2.5 miles. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will conduct a feasibility study on this trail during the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) '26. This study will help determine trail alignment, risks, possible maintenance costs, and planning level construction costs.	2027 2031	$40,000 $1,660,000

Table 20: Funded Transportation Projects (CIP FY2027-2031)

Proposed CIP / STIP Project	Description *(Justification)*	Estimate Fiscal Year	Estimated Cost
STIP 2025-2029: **Billings Bypass** **Five Mile Road to US 87**	Highway reconstruction from Five Mile Road to US 87 associated with the Billings Bypass project.	2029	$14,800,000

9.4 Goals

Goal 1: Improve vehicular transportation in the Heights (improve safety and reduce travel times, congestion, fuel consumption, and emissions).	
Strategy 1	Implement the Heights-specific projects identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan. (This should include the 2023 LRTP and projects that may be included in future LRTP updates.) Residents and organizations can advocate for project implementation.
Strategy 2	Heights residents and organizations should alert transportation agencies of additional roadway improvements that may be needed, and participate in all future transportation plan updates that impact the Heights, along with tracking funding for implementation of these projects through the CIP, TIP, and STIP documents each year.
Strategy 3	Review signal operations and make changes as needed to improve operating conditions (level of service), particularly on arterial roadways.
Strategy 4	Monitor changes in traffic volumes and patterns on new arterial roadways serving the Heights (Billings Bypass and Skyway Drive).
Strategy 5	Review policies impacting access management and curb cuts on existing and new arterials and collectors, and minimize permitted access points to ensure that they can maintain their intended functionality.
Strategy 6	Continually assess future roadways that will be needed, and identify these proposed roadways on new functional classification maps so that the community is aware and rights-of-way can be reserved.
Strategy 7	Review zoning and subdivision code and revise as needed with provisions to ensure connectivity between new subdivisions / development areas.
Strategy 8	Require traffic analysis and identification of potential mitigation measures for major developments, as determined by MPO-determined thresholds for future trips and level of service.
Strategy 9	Encourage ongoing dialogue to help improve the vehicular transportation system, and consider other suggestions and priorities from Heights residents for future planning and projects, including: • Balance improved connectivity with traffic calming and protections against excessive speeding and cut-through traffic • Address congestion around schools • Improve traffic enforcement • Improve road maintenance, including snow and ice removal • Address safety concerns about freight traffic around the Airport Road area • Consider implementation of roundabouts in the Heights • Consider widening some arterials that experience congestion

Goal 2: Improve public transportation in the Heights.	
Strategy 1	Implement the Heights-specific transit route and service changes identified in the Transit Development Plan. (This should include the 2022 TDP and projects that may be included in future TDP or other transportation plan updates.)
Strategy 2	Implement the Heights Transfer Center project.
Strategy 3	Consider Complete Streets elements supporting public transit during every roadway design or improvement project.
Strategy 4	Continue to collect input from Heights residents, businesses, and organizations about transit system improvements, future transit plan updates that impact the Heights, and prioritization of projects for funding.
Strategy 5	Incorporate other suggestions and priorities from Heights residents in future planning and projects, including: • Provide bus shelters • Increase frequency of service over time, and considering extended evening hours of operation • Increase education on how to use MET transit, and make informational materials more user-friendly • Consider expanded routes, such as between the Heights and the West End or serving areas like Alkali Creek or Mary Street • Consider opportunities for rideshare integration or park and ride • Work with the school district to find better solutions for student transportation, particularly for students who are not near MET routes but are not in locations that are eligible for school bus service

Goal 3: Improve non-motorized transportation in the Heights (including improvements to the extent and quality of facilities for walking and bicycling).	
Strategy 1	Implement the Heights-specific projects identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan and Bikeway and Trails Master Plan. (This should include the 2023 LRTP and projects that may be included in future LRTP or non-motorized plan updates.) Residents and organizations can advocate for project implementation.
Strategy 2	Implement the Heights-specific projects identified in the Safe Routes to School plans. Residents and organizations can advocate for project implementation.
Strategy 3	Consider Complete Streets elements supporting non-motorized transportation during every roadway design or improvement project.
Strategy 4	Heights residents and organizations should alert transportation agencies of additional non-motorized improvements that may be needed, and participate in all future transportation plan updates that impact the Heights, along with tracking funding for implementation of these projects through the CIP, TIP, and STIP documents each year.
Strategy 5	Incorporate other suggestions and priorities from Heights residents in future planning and projects, including: • Prioritize adding missing sidewalks throughout the neighborhood • Prioritize protected bike lanes (on-street parking or painted buffers could separate bikes from the road) • Require more street lighting to improve safety • Improve crossing safety and consider changes to turn arrows at intersections • Lower speed limits in some areas • Add more protected pathways • Add bike aid stations and restrooms along Kiwanis Trail • Add connection across the State Trust vacant land • Add a bike lane on Mary Street



10. FUTURE LAND USE

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10.0 FUTURE LAND USE

10.1 Background

In 2023, the State of Montana passed new land use legislation including the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA), which provides standardized land use planning requirements for larger cities in Montana. A key priority of this bill is to address Montana's urgent need for more housing.

In 2025, the City began their update of the citywide Growth Policy to comply with MLUPA. The citywide land use plan is required to consider existing conditions, population projections, estimated future housing needs, the development capacity of available land, constraints impacting housing development, and actions the City can take to facilitate development of adequate housing units to accommodate projected population growth. Based on this analysis, the citywide Future Land Use Map should show the city's preferred pattern and intensity of development. MLUPA includes provisions for neighborhood plans to provide more localized analysis, which can be especially useful in fast-growing areas like the Heights.

This Neighborhood Plan update takes a comprehensive look at the Heights' existing conditions, evolving trends, and future community needs. This is used to inform actions that the City of Billings might take to help move towards community vision and goals specific to the Heights. The future land use map included in this chapter (Figure 28) provides a high-level guide for preferred land use patterns as the neighborhood continues to grow. In turn, the map was carried forward into the city-wide growth policy update, Billings 2045, and adopted by the City Council in May 2026.

10.2 Future Land Use Designations

In the future land use map (Figure 28), future land use designations are used to represent the intended character of different areas in the neighborhood. These designations include residential, mixed-use, and commercial environments that may have a different look and feel. Rather than zoning districts, which dictate applicable code requirements for each parcel of land, the future land use designations are intended to be guidelines that shape future development at a high level.

The current Billings future land use designations are summarized below in Table 22. These designations were developed as part of the citywide growth policy update and used in this plan to allow for consistent categorization of land uses. The citywide future land use designations also include Downtown Urban, which was excluded from this table as it is only applicable to Downtown Billings.

As shown in Table 22, each designation includes some flexibility of the zoning districts and types of development that may be compatible. For example, the Urban Residential (UR) future land use designation can be implemented with N3, N2, N1, RMH, NX1, NO, NMU, PD, or P1 zoning, offering a range of residential densities (including single family and up to multifamily that is compatible with these areas), potential for small-scale commercial depending on the specific neighborhood context, planned developments, and parks and open space. Regardless of current development status and zoning, the future land use designations do not cause any immediate changes, but rather act as a long-term guide for development patterns over time.

Table 21: Future Land Use Designations

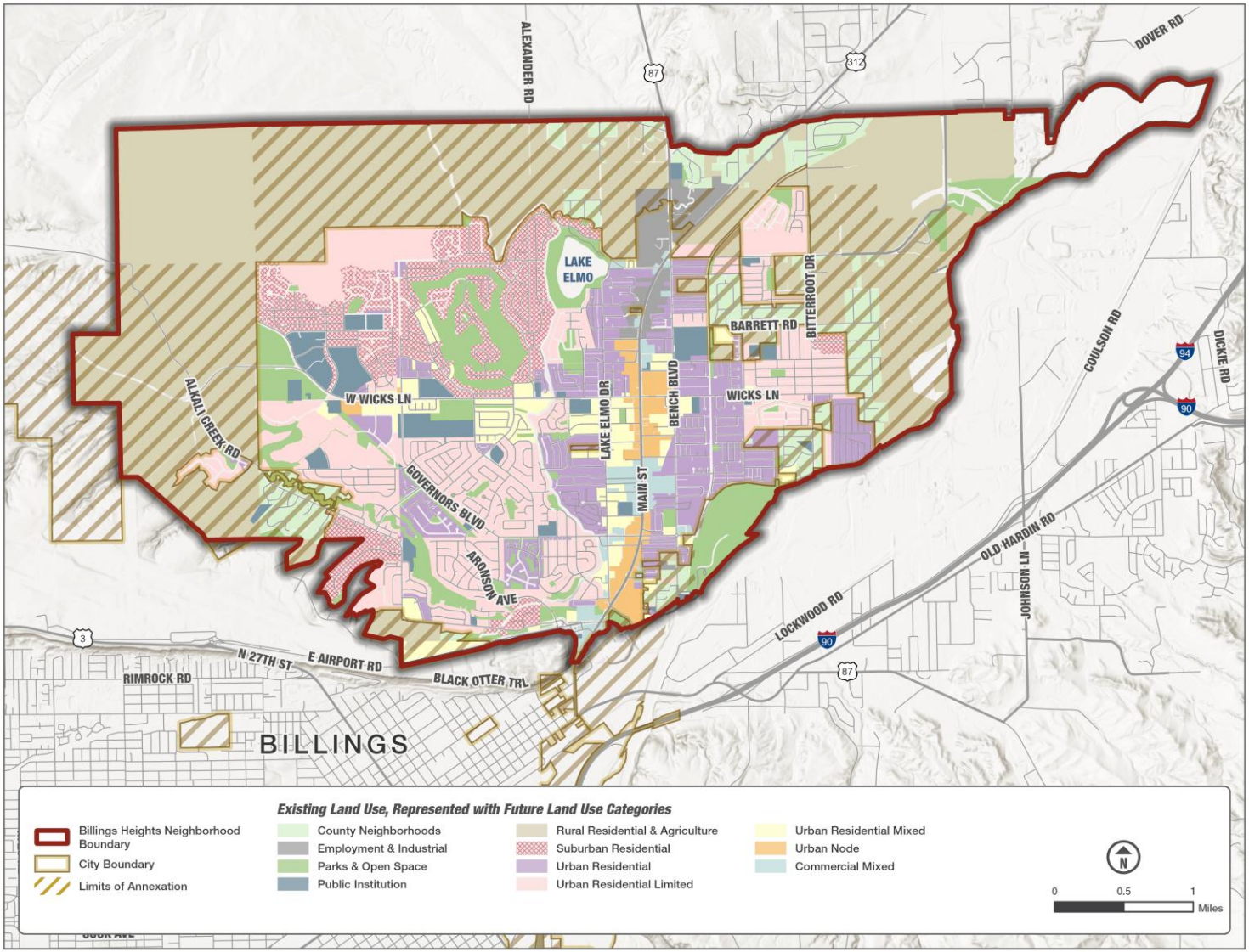
Land Use Category	Rural Residential and Agriculture (RRA)	County Neighborhoods (CN)	Suburban Residential (SR)	Urban Residential Limited (URL)
Character	Agricultural production lands and rural residential uses on lots larger than one acre that include agricultural uses and may conserve the agricultural heritage of the Yellowstone Valley. Due to the low-density nature of development, public water and wastewater utilities are generally not available.	Large lot rural neighborhoods typically not developed in the city with limited access to public water and wastewater utilities.	Existing single family residential with structures of similar setback and maximum heights with access to public water and sewer.	Suburban residential with structures of similar setback and maximum heights, most will have access to public water and sewer.
Implementing Zones	A, RR1, RR3, PD, P1	N4, RR1, RMH, PD, P1	N4, N3, PD, P1	N4, N3, N2, N1, PD, P1
Primary Land Uses	Agriculture, rural residential	Suburban residential	Suburban residential	Suburban residential
Building Types	Single family dwellings, manufactured homes, accessory dwelling units	Single family dwellings, manufactured homes, accessory dwelling units	Single family dwellings, accessory dwelling units	Single family dwellings, duplexes, accessory dwelling units
Density (Gross Development Acreage)	Max 1/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	1 - 3.5 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	4-7 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	3.5 - 7 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)
Mobility and Street Network	The street grid is more spread out, typically following section lines with private vehicles as the primary mode of transportation. Local streets are generally gravel.	Neighborhood streets connected to collectors or arterials, some of which may be paved. Future county neighborhoods should be connected to existing neighborhoods.	Paved neighborhood streets connected to collectors or arterials. These neighborhoods may have access to nearby community amenities including parks, schools, and neighborhood commercial areas.	Paved neighborhood streets connected to collectors or arterials. Future neighborhoods should be connected to existing neighborhoods. These neighborhoods may have access to nearby community amenities including parks, schools, and neighborhood commercial areas.

Land Use Category	Urban Residential (UR)	Urban Residential Mixed (URM)	Urban Node (UN)	Commercial Mixed (CM)
Character	Mixed density neighborhoods including some neighborhood commercial and housing choices from single family to townhome (4 units/structure). Public water and sewer is provided.	Higher density adjacent to mixed use with commercial services such as smaller retail businesses. Highly walkable neighborhood with possible service from transit. Typically found adjacent to Urban Nodes. Development should focus on active uses and providing a safe and comfortable environment for people, both residents and visitors.	Higher-intensity, larger-scale places where destinations like shopping and services are walkable but primarily accessed by vehicles.	Standalone commercial areas either in the city or county sometimes with adjacent higher-density residential. Could include areas in the county for contractor shops, storage, warehousing, sometimes adjacent to urban nodes, sometimes adjacent to urban residential mixed.
Implementing Zones	N3, N2, N1, RMH, NX1, NO, NMU, PD, P1	N1, RMH, NX1, NX2, NO, NMU, CMU1, PD, P1	NX2, NX3, NMU, CMU1, CMU2, PD, P1	NX2, NX3, CMU2, CX, C3, PD, P1
Primary Land Uses	Residential, neighborhood services, and small offices	Residential, commercial, Office, Public Spaces	High-density residential, commercial, mixed-use, shopping centers, public spaces, office	Higher intensity commercial uses, may include high-density residential
Building Types	Single family to four family dwellings, accessory dwelling units, neighborhood services	Single family to eight family dwellings, accessory dwelling units, commercial mixed use, offices, retail	Apartments, townhomes, multi-tenant retail, offices, commercial with or without drive thru services	Apartments, multi-tenant retail, offices, commercial with or without drive thru services, warehouse
Density (Gross Development Acreage)	6 - 16 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	12 - 24 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	16+ units/ac	16+ units/ac
Mobility and Street Network	Development is organized to support a walkable environment. Streets have adjacent sidewalks and shared use pathways to connect neighborhoods to community amenities and nearby commercial areas.	Development is organized to support a walkable environment. Streets have adjacent sidewalks and shared use pathways to connect community amenities and commercial areas with walkable blocks.	Arterials, collectors, local commercial streets supported by transit that are adjacent to sidewalks and shared use pathways.	Arterials, collectors, and local commercial streets

Land Use Category	Employment and Industrial (EI)	Open Space (OS)	Public Institution (PI)
Character	Areas of employment that provide a range of jobs in sectors such as production, manufacturing, research, distribution or extraction which may be incompatible with residential uses.	Regional public parks, recreation areas, and natural or sensitive areas which provide a variety of recreational opportunities.	Public, civic, and institutional uses located within or on the edge of neighborhoods.
Implementing Zones	CX, C3, I1, I2, EBU, PD, P1	P1	PD, P1, P2, P3
Primary Land Uses	Warehousing, hotels, larger-scale buildings providing employment	Regional and neighborhood recreational facilities as well as passive and active open spaces	Schools, churches, hospitals, public facilities (non-recreation)
Building Types	Multi-story or multiple structures to accommodate employment	Facilities associated with public use and recreation	A variety of building types varying in nature of use and sizing
Density (Gross Development Acreage)	Residential units are unlikely in these areas, but are allowed in Heavy Commercial zones	N/A	Density associated with institutional use
Mobility and Street Network	Sites are well connected to the arterial and collector street network and provide connections to interstate transportation networks (air, train, highway, etc.).	Parks and recreation sites will be well connected to adjacent neighborhoods.	Typically located on collectors or arterials. Occasionally located within neighborhoods.

To give a sense of existing development in the Heights and its alignment with the Future Land Use categories described in Table 22 above, a figure was prepared showing existing land uses and zoning, categorized by the land use categories. Figure 27 is intended to represent Existing Land Use to act as a baseline for future land use scenarios discussed in *Section 10.4*, along with the future land use map (Figure 28).

Figure 27: Existing Land Use, Represented with Future Land Use Categories



10.3 Growth Trends

As discussed in *Section 3.2.4 – Population Projection*, the Heights population is projected to grow by over 10,000 people by 2045. This plan update's Housing Needs Analysis (*Section 4.1.2*) estimates that approximately 259 additional units are needed per year to serve the growing population (based on a need for 6,482 additional units between 2020 numbers and 2045 projections).

As reflected in the existing land use patterns shown in Figure 27, the growth of the Heights has largely followed low-density suburban development patterns that align with Suburban Residential or Urban Residential Limited. If this trend of developing at minimum or near-minimum residential density continues, the Heights could face a shortage of over 4,000 units by the year 2045. If the development of available land occurred at the upper range of allowed density in all areas throughout the Heights, there is potential to produce over 15,000 units, but a combination of regulatory, economic, and physical constraints, as well as local preferences, make it unlikely to achieve neighborhood-wide maximum density.

Based on current population trends, households tend to be smaller, and there appears to be a need for more compact homes and a greater variety of housing options including "middle housing" types such as duplexes, triplexes, townhomes and similar options that fall between apartments and the large single-family homes that make up a significant portion of the Heights' land area. Beyond housing, adequate transportation networks, utility infrastructure, and other public facilities and services are needed for a well-functioning neighborhood. Many Heights residents that submitted survey responses or comments emphasized their desire for greater economic activities and community spaces that contribute to neighborhood quality of life.

It is difficult to predict how Billings and its population may continue to evolve in the future. Future land use scenario planning was used as a tool for anticipating what steps are needed to help the Heights and the City meet housing needs and work towards the Heights neighborhood vision:

"The Heights is proud to be a vibrant, family-friendly neighborhood with a small-town feel.

The community aims to enhance quality of life with balanced residential development, safe and connected transportation systems, ample parks and community amenities, diverse economic development, and the infrastructure needed to support the neighborhood as it grows."

10.4 Future Land Use Scenarios

Future land use scenarios weave together ideas across land use, transportation, economic development, public facilities and services, and more. Most importantly, they guide development patterns across the area in the future. For example, one scenario could focus on managing growth as it expands outward. Another scenario could focus around increasing residential density in existing areas near transit, employment, and amenities. There are multiple ways the City could encourage development that will serve the needs of the future population, and the preferred land use scenario will guide future zoning and development.

Examining multiple future land use scenarios is helpful because it allows the City and Billings residents to select a growth pattern that is reflective of the community's growth vision and values. The Heights community provided input on their priorities and how they would like to see the neighborhood evolve in the future. Three future land use scenarios were developed out of this input, offering a menu of different approaches from which a preferred scenario was selected. Working closely with City planning staff, the ideas from this process were carried forward into the map of the preferred scenario, or the Future Land Use Map (Figure 28).

10.3.1 Scenario Evaluation

There are a variety of ways the Heights neighborhood vision could be implemented. The following three high-level scenarios were developed to evaluate different strategies for meeting housing needs and neighborhood goals.

Scenario A: Neighborhood Expansion

This scenario would address the City's growth needs by emphasizing new residential development expanding out from the outer edges of the neighborhood, within the Limits of Annexation. The expansion would include some continuation of lower density subdivisions through the Urban Residential Limited (URL) land use designation (density of 3.5 – 7 dwelling units per acre), but it would also prioritize more compact residential neighborhood development following the Urban Residential (UR) patterns ranging up to greater density of 16 units per acre.

For decades, the growing Heights population has been expanding via new residential subdivisions developed on the outskirts of the neighborhood. There are opportunities for additional residential expansion into agricultural land within the Limits of Annexation, especially to the north and west, and this scenario would continue the pattern with an eye towards more compact new neighborhoods that serve neighborhood needs for smaller homes and attached middle housing options.

This scenario would have minimal impact on existing neighborhood form and function and in part would carry on the low-density suburban development patterns that dominate the Heights today. Outward expansion of low-density residential subdivisions would require significantly more transportation and utility infrastructure, as well as more public facilities and services to serve these remote corners of the community. Because of larger unit sizes and higher costs associated with this type of residential development, this scenario may perpetuate a mismatch between Heights housing stock and the needs of the future population based on current trends – smaller, lower cost units in a variety of configurations to serve a variety of household types.

In this scenario, the Heights would likely remain a "bedroom community" with mostly residential land uses and minimal areas of auto-oriented commercial. Many residents indicated a desire for more walkable destinations in their neighborhood, but low-density neighborhoods of solely residential are not as conducive of walkability compared to more compact areas that allow a greater mix of housing types and land uses.

Scenario B: Neighborhood Nodes

This scenario would address the City's growth needs by emphasizing new mixed-use development organized around specific development nodes / activity centers identified in the Heights. The primary focus would be to create pockets of higher intensity development to serve both housing and economic development goals. Urban Residential Mixed (URM) and Urban Node (UN) would be key land use designations in this scenario, with a minimum residential density of 16 housing units per acre in redesignated areas around nodes, ranging up to 40 units per acre closest to the new activity centers.

There is community support for more residential development concentrated in areas with adequate transportation, utilities, and other public facilities and services. New mixed-use or commercial nodes, as well as smaller-scale commercial at key intersections scattered around the neighborhood, can make the surrounding residential areas more walkable and vibrant, while also reducing traffic pressure on Main Street.

The vast majority of survey respondents – approximately 85% – said that walkability is one of the most important and desired neighborhood characteristics. This suggests demand for

neighborhood commercial or institutional uses with access to recreation and open space.

This scenario may have the potential to create the most visible changes in the Heights, as it would create a set of new higher-intensity mixed-use nodes along with neighborhood commercial and mixed-use spread across major intersections throughout the neighborhood. The City could catalyze adequate housing to meet future needs in the Heights through a smaller set of impactful projects in strategic locations, rather than relying on slower processes of outward expansion or gradual infill development. This scenario would balance commercial and higher density residential opportunities in different concentrated locations across the neighborhood, paving the way for greater walkability immediately adjacent to nodes and neighborhood commercial locations, but also across the neighborhood as a whole.

Some community members expressed concern about protecting the existing character of their primarily residential neighborhood. Balancing higher intensity nodes that can bring new life to the neighborhood with appropriate density transitions can help address these concerns, allowing for a continued mix of higher and lower intensity parts of the Heights neighborhood. Especially given the already significant changes occurring with new transportation access from the west and east, there may be opportunities to establish nodes that guide growth in new centers, rather than significantly altering established areas.

Scenario C: Neighborhood Infill

This scenario would address the City's growth needs by emphasizing greater residential density within existing developed areas of the Heights. It is envisioned that new housing would be spread relatively evenly throughout the neighborhood rather than just expanding outward or just around specific nodes. Across many areas of the Heights, the baseline land uses could be upgraded to the next level of intensity. For example, many URL areas could be designated as UR, which may encourage more compact infill and redevelopment that still fits within the character of the existing neighborhood – just allowing closer to 6 to 16 units per acre rather than 3.5 to 7 units per acre associated with URL.

Many existing residential areas in the Heights are low density. This has resulted in greater distances between homes and neighborhood amenities, and significantly more infrastructure is needed to serve relatively few homes. A strategy centered on infill across the neighborhood would promote moderate increases in housing density, such as through encouraging duplexes, triplexes, and similar small-scale multifamily, as well as cottage clusters and ADUs. This development pattern can provide additional smaller and more affordable housing options, in line with trends in housing needs, while blending into the existing Heights context and making efficient use of existing infrastructure networks.

This scenario would focus on multiple strategies to encourage infill development to move the neighborhood towards meeting the housing needs of its future population. Some elements of this strategy build on existing efforts across the state to allow for "gentle density" incorporated into established low-density residential neighborhoods. However, it is anticipated that the process of creating more housing in these established neighborhoods will be slow-going. For that reason, specific new development and redevelopment focus could be placed on vacant and underutilized sites in this scenario, which may help catalyze more development in creative ways, potentially helping foster a greater mix of residential and commercial uses and contributing to neighborhood vitality.

One downside of an infill focus is that the need to fit into areas on a case-by-case basis can limit impact of each individual project as compared to new higher intensity development that may be possible surrounding larger neighborhood nodes of development.

Summary

The three scenarios incorporated public input gathered as part of the plan update process, along with City insight on how to meet housing and other neighborhood needs in a way that aligns with the neighborhood vision. Additional description and evaluation of these scenarios are available in Appendix 2. Based on the evaluation of the scenarios, Scenario B, Neighborhood Nodes provides a balance of opportunities for focused growth and enhancing existing areas of the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Nodes concept acted as the primary guide for the Future Land Use Map (Figure 28).

10.5 Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map (Figure 28) builds on current development patterns in the Heights by identifying key nodes of development and setting the stage for additional infill development across the neighborhood. Nodes are labeled on the map; these areas are focus points that encourage activity, but the exact organization of land use in these areas will evolve over time and is intentionally flexible. Primary nodes encourage higher concentrations of mixed-use development, typically anchored by designations including Urban Node (orange), Commercial Mixed (light blue), and/or Urban Residential Mixed (yellow). Secondary nodes are smaller-scale centers that could be as simple as a corner store or coffee shop that offer a walkable destination for nearby residents. It often makes economic sense for these businesses to want to be located near a greater density of potential customers, and many residents are interested in greater walkability, so secondary nodes can go hand-in-hand with multifamily development that is designed to transition between commercial uses and lower density residential uses. Urban Residential (purple) is shown across most of the neighborhood as it can transition between nodes and lower intensity residential areas, supporting additional housing as opportunities for infill development arise while remaining sensitive to the surrounding neighborhood context. The nodes identified on the map are summarized below.

Primary Nodes

Main and Hilltop: Near the south end of the Main Street strip, this primary node is an active concentration of businesses including restaurants, a grocery store, retail, and more. Transit access and proximity to downtown is a benefit to this location. The south end of the Kiwanis Trail and Two Moon Park are also not far away, providing non-motorized connectivity and recreation opportunities. While there is already commercial activity and relatively compact residential development nearby, there are opportunities for infill and redevelopment on vacant and underutilized parcels in this area, which would allow for an increase in residential and commercial density. Improved Main Street crossings and other pedestrian improvements can help transition this area from auto-oriented to a more walkable activity center.

Main and Wicks: This node is located at the center of the Heights. Similar to the Main and Hilltop node, it already has a concentration of commercial activity, but surrounding vacant and underutilized land presents opportunities for infill and redevelopment. An increase in residential density in this area would be served by the relatively high concentration of nearby schools. Wicks is the Heights' primary east-west corridor that is served by transit, and non-motorized transportation improvements are also planned along Wicks, which will enhance transportation options and help support a transition to a more pedestrian-focused experience.

Main and Billings Bypass: At the north end of the Main Street corridor in the Heights, where it splits off into Highway 87 and Highway 312, there is an existing mix of commercial and industrial activity that is more employment-focused than the other restaurant and retail-focused nodes along the corridor. Given the new Billings Bypass connection, this location will experience increased transportation options and may expand as an employment hub for the neighborhood. Along the Billings Bypass between Main Street and Bitterroot Drive, vacant land may be developed as a mix of

apartments and additional office and employment uses, anchoring the north end of the neighborhood.

West Heights Town Center: At the west end of the Heights, at the intersection of Wicks Lane and Governors Boulevard there is a significant area of vacant land that has increased connectivity to the rest of Billings via Skyway Drive. Much of this land is owned by the State of Montana, and while the land has been zoned and planned for development, challenging soils and economic considerations have been barriers to development so far. The City could initiate discussions with the State to potentially revisit plans for development in this area, which is close to several schools and Castle Rock Park. This node may be the most likely location for additional mixed-use development potential outside of the Main Street corridor, and the vacant land offers opportunity for an urban form that is truly walkable, which is more difficult to retrofit elsewhere in the Heights.

Secondary Nodes

West Heights Gateway: In the long term, the new intersection of Skyway Drive and Alkali Creek Road may serve as a secondary node at the west end of the Heights neighborhood. A mix of commercial and residential uses can take advantage of new connectivity and infrastructure and act as a gateway into the Heights.

High Sierra Neighborhood Center: Currently at the edge of the neighborhood but adjacent to vacant land within the city limits and Limits of Annexation to the north, residential neighborhoods at the northwest corner of the Heights could be enhanced with neighborhood-compatible commercial development at the intersection of Annandale Road (a minor arterial that is planned to extend west) and Gleneagles Boulevard (a principal arterial that is planned to extend north). These amenities would also support multifamily development, offering a wider range of housing options.

Alkali Creek Neighborhood Center: Like High Sierra, the Alkali Creek neighborhood is located at the edge of the Heights, farther from walkable destinations. Small-scale commercial development used to exist in this corner of the Heights, and there is neighborhood interest in re-establishing commercial use in this location. This could be compatible with a small pocket of multifamily residential development, providing more variety in housing options.

Bitterroot and Wicks: As part of ongoing improvements to Wicks Lane, there may be an opportunity to add a small neighborhood commercial center at the intersection and promote a higher density of housing in the surrounding area along Wicks Lane and Bitterroot Drive. Vacant City land and developed County land in the vicinity may be suitable for infill development of more compact housing types similar to some of the multifamily developments that already exist in this part of the Heights.

Bitterroot and Billings Bypass: Similar to the Main and Billings Bypass primary node, this secondary node is located at a prominent intersection along the new Billings Bypass corridor. There is significant undeveloped land around this secondary node. While it is located farther out where utility extensions may be difficult, the new transportation infrastructure can help spur enough commercial and multifamily residential development to make these additional infrastructure investments worthwhile.

East Heights Gateway: At the northeast corner of the Heights, the new Billings Bypass crossing will provide a new entrance to the neighborhood. The river crossing and the landing's location within the growing Dover Park natural area can create an attractive gateway experience that encourages sense of place unique to the Heights. The Billings Bypass Corridor Study identified the area around the intersection of the Billings Bypass and 5 Mile Road for higher density housing development and potential commercial uses as part of this. This development may face utility challenges but may be more financially feasible if allowed high enough density to offset the costs.

General Future Land Use Priorities

Meeting housing needs of the growing community is a major priority for the City, especially as housing costs continue to soar across Montana. Wherever possible, whether it be infill development or redevelopment of existing City or County developed parcels, the City wishes to facilitate a more compact pattern, including multifamily and smaller housing unit options that are aligned with population and household trends as well as compact single-family areas where they do exist. Large areas of Urban Residential (purple) are shown on the map, and while these can include density down to the N3 zone, new zoning code and incentive strategies may be used to encourage maximizing the use of the land, especially around Urban Node (orange) and Urban Residential Mixed (yellow) areas. The flexibility of the Urban Residential designation is a strength, and it should be interpreted to maximize density near nodes and then transition out towards the Heights' established single-family areas.

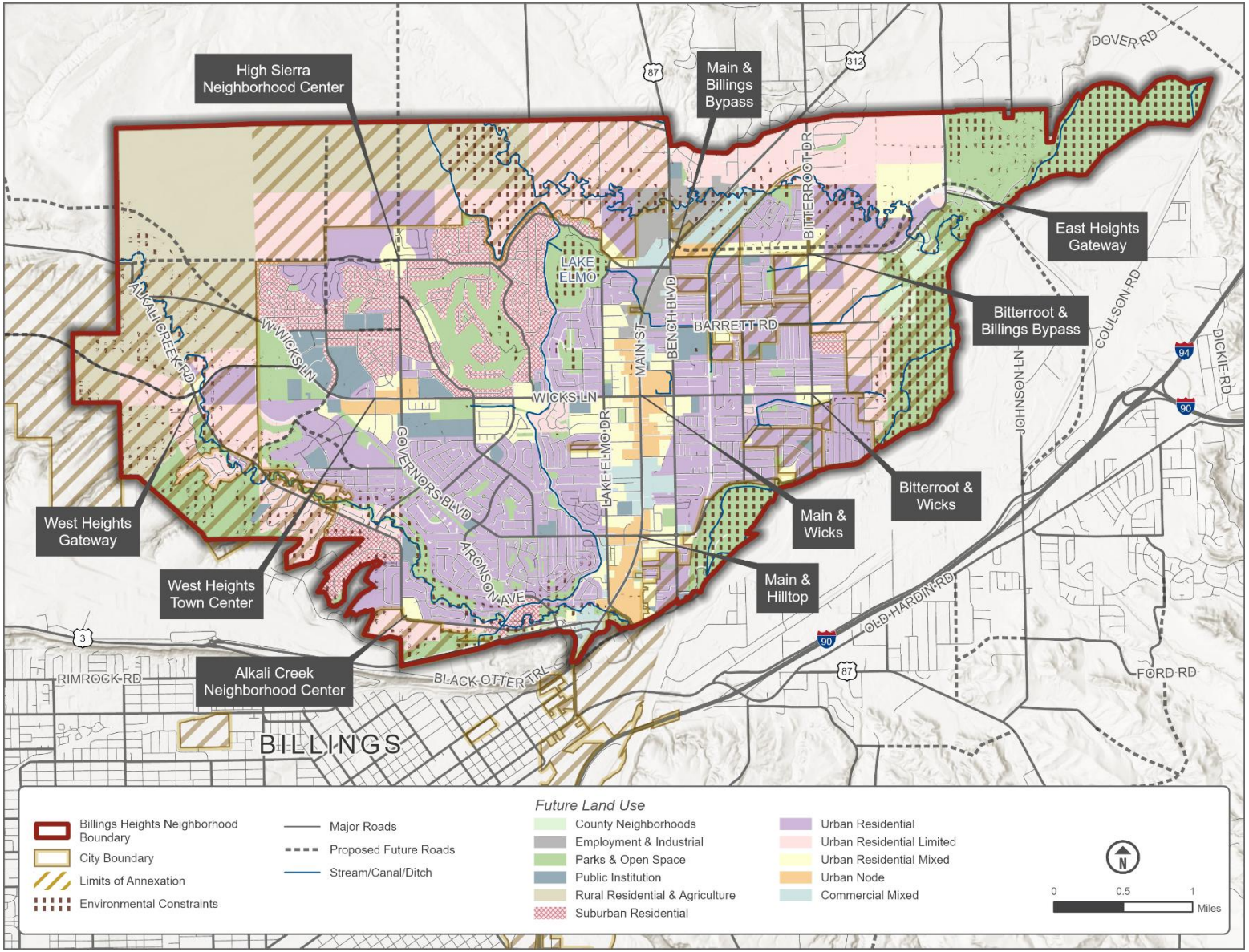
Many Heights residents are interested in greater walkability and economic development activities in their neighborhood. Higher density housing will be key to the success of these goals, providing a greater customer base and supporting mixed-use development that adds social and economic benefits to the area. This kind of development can grow a sense of neighborhood identity beyond a bedroom community.

Transportation investments can spur neighborhood growth and change for the better. Two new major connections out of the neighborhood (Skyway Drive and the Billings Bypass) will improve mobility to and from the Heights. Non-motorized improvements are planned throughout the area, building on existing facilities and retrofitting some parts of the Heights for the walkability (and bike facilities) residents would like to see. MET Transit's proposed Heights Transfer Center can be another step towards transitioning Main Street nodes into more walkable and human-scale (rather than auto-oriented as the area exists today). Development should be most focused around the identified nodes, supported by other development along the Main Street strip; smaller and more compact focus areas are better suited to creating walkability.

Utility extensions to County areas on the periphery are expensive and challenging. The Future Land Use Map proposes annexation of County islands and other developed areas within the Heights, creating opportunities for infill housing development that still includes the single-family residential feel that many Heights residents appreciate. These expansion areas are minimized given the nodal and infill development focus of the preferred growth scenario. Additional public facilities will likely be needed over time, such as public safety facilities and schools, and coordination with these departments should continue.

The Heights has a beautiful natural setting thanks to features including the Rims, the river, multiple creeks, and regional-scale parks including Lake Elmo and Dover Park. As the neighborhood grows, additional parks and natural areas should be set aside for the enjoyment of future generations in the Heights.

Figure 28: Billings Heights Future Land Use Map



10.6 Goals

Goal 1: Encourage the development of primary and secondary nodes of commercial and compact residential development.	
Strategy 1	Identify zoning map changes that allow a more compact, urban, walkable urban node pattern of development around primary nodes, rather than the existing auto-oriented pattern in the Heights. Implementation concepts may include: • Offer increased zoning allowance in exchange for desired patterns of development, potentially as part of future Planned Neighborhood Development code updates. • Through a future update to the Infill Policy and potentially other modifications to existing commercial and mixed-use zones, encourage desired land use and infill development on underutilized portions of existing sites. • Explore potential financial incentives to spur economic development in these locations.
Strategy 2	Encourage the development of secondary nodes at identified key intersections within otherwise residential areas by implementing the Future Land Use Map with zoning for medium density housing and light mixed-use development in these locations, as multifamily development and neighborhood commercial can support each other. The City could also explore potential financial incentives to spur economic development in these locations.
Strategy 3	Engage with the Heights Business Association, commercial property owners, and local economic development stakeholders to identify barriers to development in identified primary and secondary nodes, and potential ways to address these barriers.
Strategy 4	Work with MET Transit to monitor the Heights Transfer Center project and other potential bus route changes and develop a long-term strategy for transit-oriented development in the Heights.
Strategy 5	Work with MDT to implement non-motorized transportation and other safety and urban design improvements along Main Street, with a goal of transitioning toward a more human-scale corridor than a high-traffic highway feel.
Strategy 6	Work with the State of Montana to revisit strategy for encouraging development on the State land adjacent to the identified “West Heights Town Center” primary node.

Goal 2: Encourage infill housing development that can meet the evolving needs of the growing neighborhood.	
Strategy 1	Adjacent to primary nodes, promote high density multifamily development through the following potential strategies: • Consider pursuing targeted, City-led rezones • Potential for City support of mixed-income and affordable housing development • Use other strategies identified in the Montana Land Use Planning Act to encourage more housing development (see *Chapter 4 – Housing*)
Strategy 2	Adjacent to secondary nodes, promote medium density housing development through the following potential strategies: • Consider pursuing targeted, City-led rezones • Potential for City support of mixed-income and affordable housing development • Use other strategies identified in the Montana Land Use Planning Act to encourage more housing development (see *Chapter 4 – Housing*)
Strategy 3	Surrounding primary and secondary nodes, as well as anywhere infill residential development is occurring in the central areas of the neighborhood and near major streets, encourage housing development that aligns with the character of the Urban Residential future land use designation (including a range of compact single-family, multifamily, and mixed-use development) rather than lower density single-family development patterns. The City could consider the following potential strategies: • Create a zoning overlay for the areas surrounding nodes, with special design standards • Modify zoning code to facilitate and encourage greater residential density in these areas, such as through incentives
Strategy 4	Work with the Community Development Division to identify potential financial incentives like low-interest loans, fee waivers, and grants that could be offered to housing developers proposing projects surrounding primary and secondary nodes.
Strategy 5	Work with the State of Montana to encourage residential development on the State land adjacent to the identified “West Heights Town Center” primary node. Consider the following potential strategies: • Meet with local market-rate and affordable housing developers to identify primary barriers to development • Consider pursuing public-private partnerships for development

Goal 3: Prepare for future annexation and development of additional county lands.	
Strategy 1	Update the City's Limits of Annexation to include all developed county land within the Heights neighborhood in the Zone 1 Annexation Petition area (both "county islands" and developed areas on the periphery that are included in the Future Land Use Map).
Strategy 2	Work with utility providers to identify extensions and upgrades that would be needed to serve new development or redevelopment areas.
Strategy 3	Explore potential financial incentives that could be offered to county landowners to encourage annexation and redevelopment.

Goal 4: Encourage responsible development around existing and new major corridors.	
Strategy 1	As additional new roadways are planned in the future, continue to prepare corridor studies and consider zoning designations and standards for lands on these corridors to address site design and architectural standards intended to support pedestrian orientation.



11.0 IMPLEMENTATION and NEXT STEPS

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11.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

11.1 Implementing the Neighborhood Vision

To restate the Heights Neighborhood Vision Statement for 2045:

"The Heights is proud to be a vibrant, family-friendly neighborhood with a small-town feel.

The community aims to enhance quality of life with balanced residential development, safe and connected transportation systems, ample parks and community amenities, diverse economic development, and the infrastructure needed to support the neighborhood as it grows."

A successful neighborhood plan documents current conditions, trends, and community ideas about the present and the future, with the goal of guiding actions that could be taken by the City, neighborhood organizations and businesses, and residents to move towards the community's vision. While the vision statement is high-level language about the future of the Heights, it emphasizes several key elements that the neighborhood wants to prioritize in the future. The elements of the neighborhood vision can act as a high-level guiding principles for implementing and measuring the success of the plan.

Implementation Guiding Principles:

- ***Neighborhood pride***
- ***Vibrant, family-friendly neighborhood with a small-town feel***
- ***Enhanced quality of life***
- ***Balanced residential development***
- ***Safe and connected transportation systems***
- ***Ample parks and community amenities***
- ***Diverse economic development***
- ***Infrastructure needed to support the neighborhood as it grows***

These guiding principles are made more specific with the goals in each chapter of this plan. Under each goal, the strategies provide potential action items to move towards neighborhood goals.

Tracking Progress: The City and community members can track progress on each individual goal and strategy identified in this plan. The goals and strategies can act as a checklist for community projects, action items, and priorities to advance. Responsibility for implementation may vary between the City, community members, and others depending on the strategy. The City and community members can also track progress and help advocate for the advancement of goals and strategies in the implementation checklist.

Living Document: While many goals and strategies are enduring and core to the Heights neighborhood vision as reflected in this Neighborhood Plan Update, changes in goals and strategies can happen naturally over time. Neighborhood conditions or priorities may change, or new strategies may emerge to help work towards neighborhood goals. Amendments can be made to this document, and future planning documents that carry forward the goals and strategies of this plan can be adjusted to reflect these changes.

Assessing Effectiveness: Achieving the goals and strategies in the implementation checklist will take time. Progress will likely be incremental. Over time, effectiveness can be measured based on incremental progress as well as achieving plan goals and strategies. Ongoing engagement with the plan is also a marker of success.

11.2 Relationship to MLUPA Implementation

Several sections of the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MCA 76-25) address plan implementation.

MCA 76-25-102 addresses the purpose and intent of MLUPA. Comprehensive planning like the citywide Growth Policy Update serves as the basis for implementing new land use regulations and can provide backup for approving development proposals that align with land use plans. This can help streamline government decision-making on proposed development that aligns with the neighborhood vision and goals. Because this Heights Neighborhood Plan Update informs the citywide plan, Heights vision and goals are represented in the citywide land use map and goals and strategies.

MCA 76-25-216 addresses implementation for the land use plan and future land use maps that MLUPA requires from major cities across Montana. Plans must establish “meaningful and predictable implementation measures” that deal with future land use and development, new land use regulations, future zoning changes, and other programs and actions the City might take such as in relation to capital improvements to serve future land uses. This section also requires monitoring and evaluating progress toward implementation.

The Heights Neighborhood Plan Update provides guidance for neighborhood-specific priorities that the City should include as it develops and implements the citywide plan. Implementation of the Heights vision, goals, and strategies can be considered positive progress towards citywide land use plan implementation.

11.3 Implementation Checklist

The purpose of the Implementation Checklist is to consolidate the goals and strategies throughout this plan update to facilitate ongoing monitoring and evaluation of implementation progress. See *Appendix 3* for the Implementation Checklist. The checklist is intended to be a living document that can evolve and grow with the Heights over time.

APPENDIX 1:
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

BILLINGS HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

PREPARED FOR

CITY OF BILLINGS
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PREPARED BY

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DOWL
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Project Engagement Lead
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406.869.6333

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Introduction

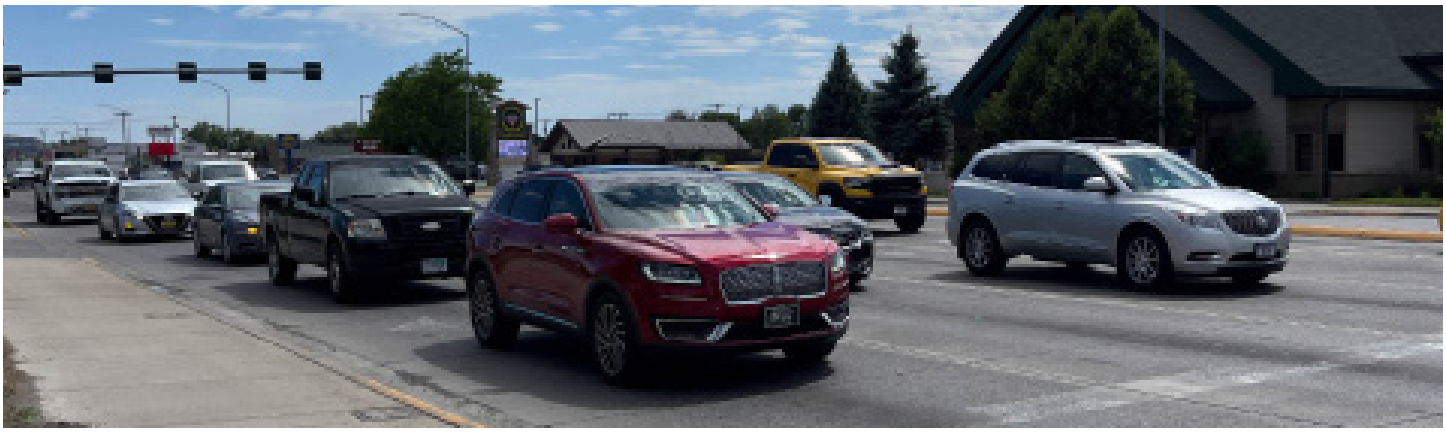
In accordance with the City of Billings Land Use Planning Public Participation Plan, the purpose of this Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to help the project team identify and outline opportunities for continuous public parcicipation in the development of the updated Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan.

The PPP will also help the project team provide relevant, accurate, and consistent project information to stakeholders and the general public.

Project Summary

Working from the existing Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan that was developed in 2005, this project will include a comprehensive analysis and recommendations for city and county agencies to use when developing future plans for the Billings Heights ("Heights").

The updated plan will focus on themes identified through public participation activities such as surveys, feedback forms, open houses, and stakeholder meetings. We anticipate those themes to align with categories such as public safety, education, economic development, and more. The plan will also include a transportation analysis and tangible implementation strategies.



Public Participation Objectives

The city's public participation (PP) objective is to "consistently keep the public well informed and actively involved at every stage of the local planning process, starting from the formulation of planning policies, progressing through the conceptual phases of planning projects, and concluding with the formal adoption of planning documents." Our team understands that proactively engaging the community and key stakeholders throughout the project is essential in building trust with the community, creating opportunities for public participation, and ultimately developing a high-quality planning document that represents the needs and values of the community.

For this project, our PP goals are to:

- Provide useful and timely information to the public throughout the development of the project.
- Provide opportunities for verbal and written comments from the public.
- Facilitate open discussion of controversial issues and/or communication themes.
- Respond to comments and suggestions.

- Confirm public comments are fully considered so that useful ideas are incorporated into the project as appropriate given availability of resources and policy constraints.

Strategies to inform the public on the project will include:

- Engaging the steering committee to provide oversight and input to inform plan development.
- Developing a website and corresponding materials to share general project information and to connect the public with opportunities to provide input (e.g. comment form, online survey, interactive map, etc).
- Meeting with stakeholder groups to determine shared goals, gather input, and facilitate open conversations about the project.
- Planning, promoting, and hosting two open houses to discuss project with members of the public.
- Distributing press releases about the project and coordinating with area media to raise awareness about the project and promote public participation.
- Sending periodic email updates to the project distribution list.

Communication Objectives

Effective and open communication will play a vital role in the project's success as it relates to public and stakeholder receptiveness and participation.

The key communication objectives for this project are:

- To identify and share key communication themes with stakeholders and the general public.
- To share project information in a clear, concise mannner to increase understanding, public interest, and input.
- To promote public meetings and other public participation opportunities.
- To consistently communicate the purpose and status of the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan.
- To engage the community and stakeholders throughout the project.
- To provide information on policy- and regulatory-driven processes.



Project Area Demographics

Located on the northeast end of Billings, Montana, the Heights neighborhood is nestled between Billings' notable rimrocks (also referred to as the "rims") and the Yellowstone River. With about 33,500 residents, the Heights houses about one third of the city's total population. Longtime residents of the Heights are known for having a prideful sense of community. Since it's annexation to the city of Billings in the 1980's, the Heights has experienced consistent growth due to various factors including affordable housing, easy access to outdoor recreation, good shools, and other quality of life amenities.

Despite consistent growth, connectivity challenges between the Heights and Billings proper have contributed to the perception that the Heights is a less desirable place to live and/or start a business. Most of the commercial district of the Heights is centered around Main Street, the primary access point for many surrounding neighborhoods and Highway 312. As a result, Main Street has become a heavily used commercial corridor. The ongoing construction of additional roadways through the Inner Belt Loop and Billings Bypass projects are intended to increase connectivity, improve traffic operations, and make the Heights more accessible overall.

Understanding these demographics and how they relate to the continued growth and improvement of the Heights will be instrumental in tailoring our communications approach.







Target Audiences

Our team will taylor our outreach and engagement approach with the following Target Audiences in mind.

	Audience	Communication Purpose
1	**Steering Committee**	• Coordination/collaboration to discuss ideas and share opportunities to provide input. • Inform about project status. • Establish open lines of communication and facilitate a dialogue to inform document development.
2	**Stakeholder Groups*** • Heights Task Force • Heights Business Association • Yellowstone River Parks Association • Big Sky Economic Development • Law enforcement/EMS • School district representatives • Local clubs (Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.)	• Involve them in the project; learn about needs. • Facilitate in-person meetings to collect input. • Inform about project status.
3	**Business and Property Owners**	• Introduce project and share opportunities to provide input. • Inform about project status. • Facilitate open dialogue about comments/concerns. • Garner support.
4	**General Public**	• Provide general project information and inform about project status. • Share opportunities for public participation. • Garner support.
5	**Media**	• Provide general project information. • Share opportunities for public participation. • Individual coordination to encourage media coverage and consistent project messaging.

**Additional stakeholder groups (up to 10) will be identified in collaboration with the Steering Committee as the project evolves. This is a preliminary list.*

Communication Tactics

Our team will engage stakeholders and members of the public early in the data collection phase to solicit input and discuss the purpose of the project. We will develop targeted communications specific to the audiences identified in the table on page 4. The overall communications and engagement strategy will focus on delivering timely, accurate, and clear information to encourage public participation and support for the project using the tactics outlined in the table below.

	Project Phase				
Outreach/Communication Tactic	Project Initiation	Data Collection/ Analysis	Document Development	Draft Document	Finalize/Revise Document
Public Participation Plan Development	X				
Logo and Brand Development	X				
Develop Stakeholde/Media Contact Lists	X				
Website, Interactive Map, and Online Survey	X				
Open Houses and Informational Video (including promotion, presentation materials, and media outreach)		X		X	
Graphics and Project Area Photography	X	X	X		
Stakeholder Meetings and Coordination	X	X	X		
Steering Committee Development, Coordination, and Meeting Facilitation	X	X	X	X	X

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan	DATE:	09/25/2024
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	5 – 7 p.m.
ORGANIZER:	DOWL / City of Billings / MPO	SUBJECT:	Open House

PROJECT TEAM ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Nicole Cromwell	City of Billings / MPO
Wyeth Friday	City of Billings
Read Stapleton	DOWL
Kate Silber	DOWL
Doug Enderson	DOWL
Megan McLean	DOWL
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL

DOWL and the MPO hosted an open house on behalf of the City of Billings, Yellowstone County, and the Billings-Yellowstone County MPO to engage the Heights community in the planning process, collect feedback, and to share general information about the Heights Neighborhood Plan.

Project messaging included:

- General project information (i.e. goals, focus areas, etc.).
- Anticipated timeline for plan development.
- Maps illustrating the project boundary, how development has changed in the Heights over time, current community/public facilities, planned and existing transportation routes/projects, and an overview of Heights zoning classifications.

Open house materials included:

- Large aerial maps of the project boundary with opportunities for attendees to draw or add comments on them.
- Display boards with project information and how to contact the project team.
- Idea boards to encourage comments and ideas from attendees.
- Flyers with a QR code for the website.
- Comment cards.
- Sign-in sheet.
- Printed copies of the engagement survey.
- Laptop to help attendees complete the online survey or view additional resources related to the Plan.

Attendance:

With approximately 100 attendees throughout the evening, this event had a great turnout. Most attendees were engaged and committed to understanding the challenges and opportunities of continued growth in the Heights. Several questions and concerns related to a recent rezone request. Although that issue is outside the scope of this project, it led to productive

conversations between attendees and the project team and provided community members with accurate information straight from the source (i.e. Nicole and Wyeth).

Attendees primarily included:

- Heights residents and business owners
- Steering committee members
- Community leaders (Mayor Cole, City Council members, etc.)







Key take-aways and lessons learned:

- **Meeting format:** The open house format worked well for this event. The open layout of the room helped create a casual and inviting atmosphere. A couple of attendees expressed confusion about why that there would be no formal presentation, but their concerns related primarily to a requested zoning change outside of this project.

- **Date/Time:** Most attendees arrived between 5 and 6 p.m. and left by 7 p.m. Attendees seemed to appreciate that they could come and go as they liked, rather than sitting down for a formal presentation.

- **Comments:** About 75 written comments were made throughout the night using the designated “Idea Boards,” display boards, and roll plots. In addition to written comments,

many attendees engaged in productive conversations with the project team sharing their concerns, questions, and ideas including:

  - Questions about “man camp” style housing. Some were concerned about it negatively impacting their neighborhoods. Nicole explained the intention behind this style of housing.
  - Discussion and questions about the requested rezone in the Heights.
  - Positive comments about the opportunities that the updated Neighborhood Plan could bring to the Heights.
  - Thoughts about traffic congestion, traffic calming, and other transportation issues.
  - Comments about the need for walkable neighborhoods, commercial development off Main Street, and the desire for more multi-use trails and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

- **Roll Plot (aerial map print-outs):** The roll plot maps of the project boundary were useful in supporting conversation between attendees and members of the project team. At future events, it may be helpful to print them at an even larger scale and provide more sharpies/markers to make comments easier to read.

- **Flyer:** While only about 1/3 of attendees took a flyer, it was still worth having them to provide them with easy to access project information after they left the open house.

- **QR codes:** It was useful to have QR codes on all the display boards and in different places throughout the room. It helped attendees quickly access the website, interactive map, and survey. In the days following the open house, we’ve received more than 50 survey responses.

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Please sign in to let us know you were here!

Name (first and last)	Address	Email*	I am a:
Debbie Brown	909 Constitution Ave.	mrs_db@hotmail.com	☑ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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Frank Munson	1445 Las Palmas Ave	frank.munson623 @ yahoo.com	☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
Corrine Kelly	1317 N. Church	corrine200@bresnan.net	☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
STEPHANIE HAIDER	729 ARONSON		☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
Kelly Stokman	1522 Wicks Lane	stokmanhouse@sbcglobal.net	☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
			☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

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Name (first and last)	Address	Email*	I am a:
Connie Hayes	645 Cherry Hills Rd	hayeshiker@gmail.com	☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
Mitchell Hayes	645 Cherry Hills Rd	Hayesgun@gmail.com	I am a: ☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
LaVonne Anderson	1093 Lincoln Ln.	none	I am a: ☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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LEE TOSTENRUD	1239 Benjamin Blvd		I am a: ☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
Emily Hunt	911 ortega St	justinLHunte yahoo.com	I am a: ☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

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Paul Downey	2139 Ridgeview 59105		☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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Brad Kelsch Marlene Kelsch	2338 Riverrocks Dr. 59105	1426renwood@gmail.com	☑ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
TAM RODIER	151 ERICKSON CT W 59105	rodiert@billingsmt.gov	☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

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Name (first and last)	Address	Email*	I am a:
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	2239 R. Agency Dr	laigaum@[illegible]	☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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Ken & Vonna Hamann	230 Joy Lane		☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
Wayne Freisatz	3003 Bitterroot	WFreisatz@gmail.com	☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

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Bill Cole		colebe@billingsmt.gov	☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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Roger Cravaack			I am a: ☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

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Name (first and last)	Address	Email*	I am a:
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Jennifer Owen	906 Royal Ave	owenj@billingsmt.gov	☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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Cheryl + Jim Hoover	2315 Columbine	satsuma67@gmail.com	☒ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

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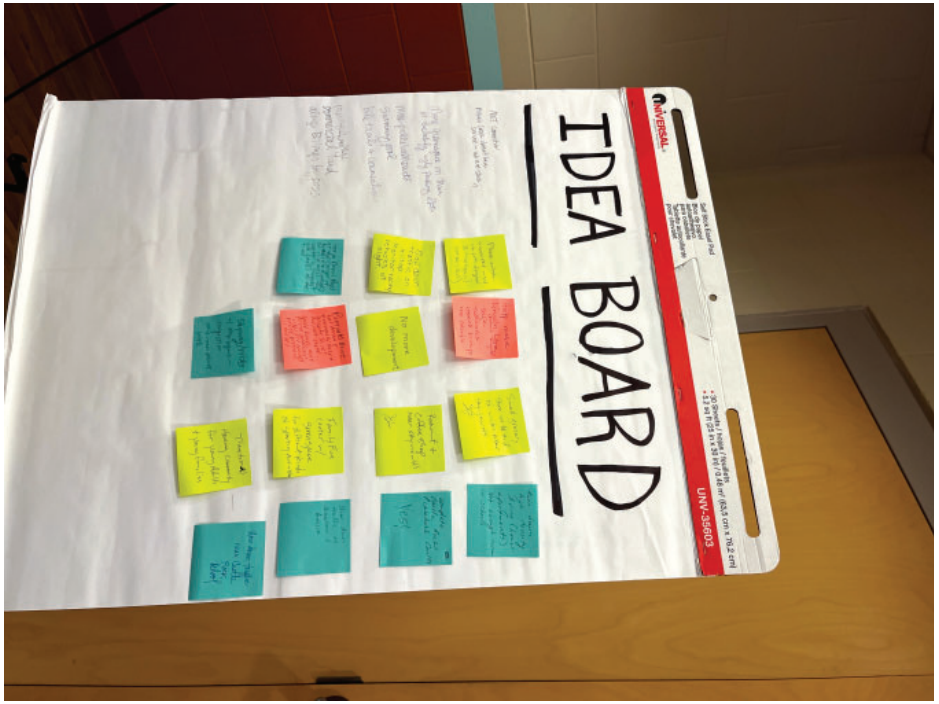
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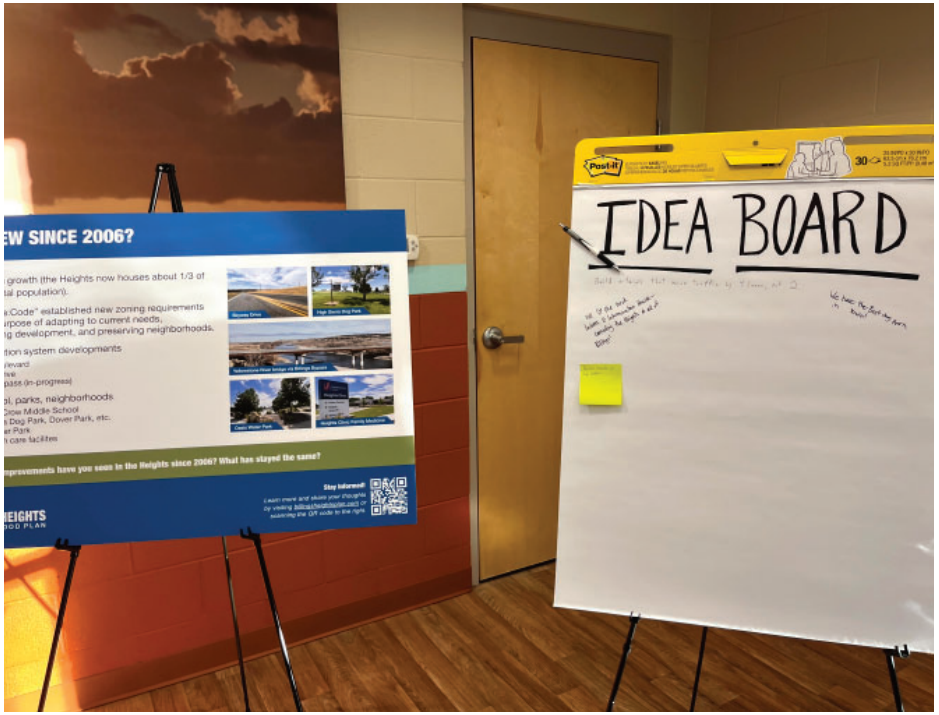
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[illegible]			I am a: ☐ Heights Resident ☐ Heights Business Owner ☐ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other
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Kyle Nelson	1402 Watson Peak Rd	kylewadenelson@gmail.com	I am a: ☒ Heights Resident ☒ Heights Business Owner ☒ Community Leader ☐ Interested Party/Other

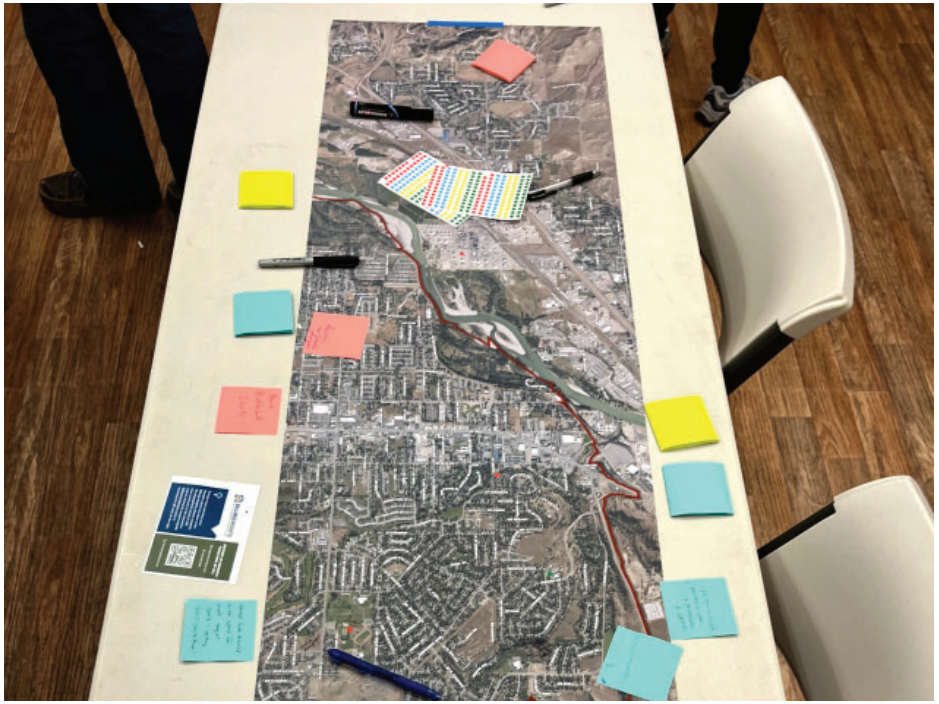
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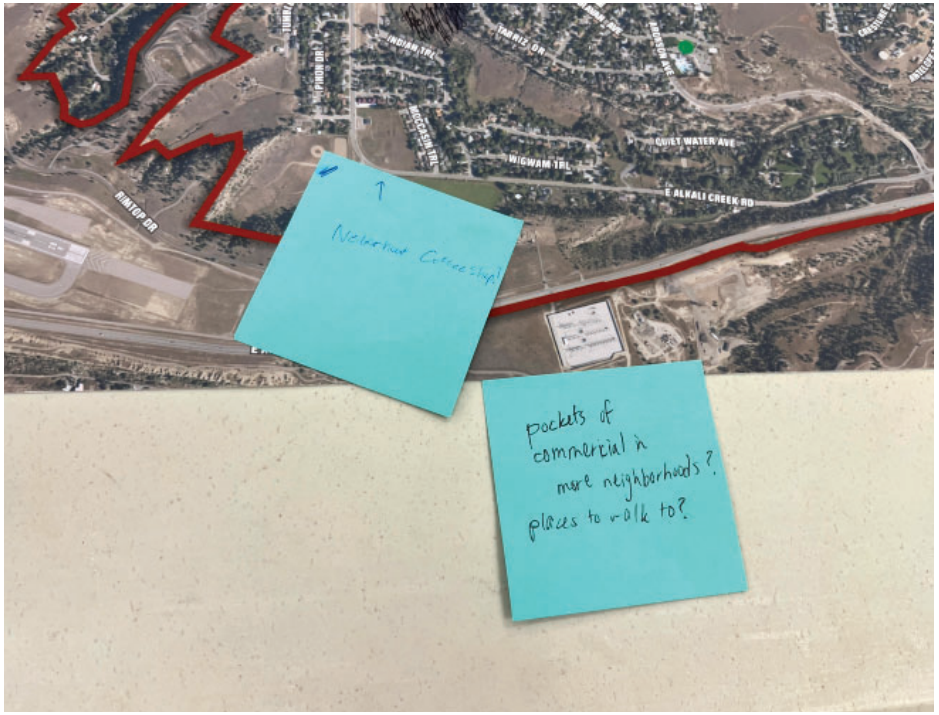

IDEA BOARD

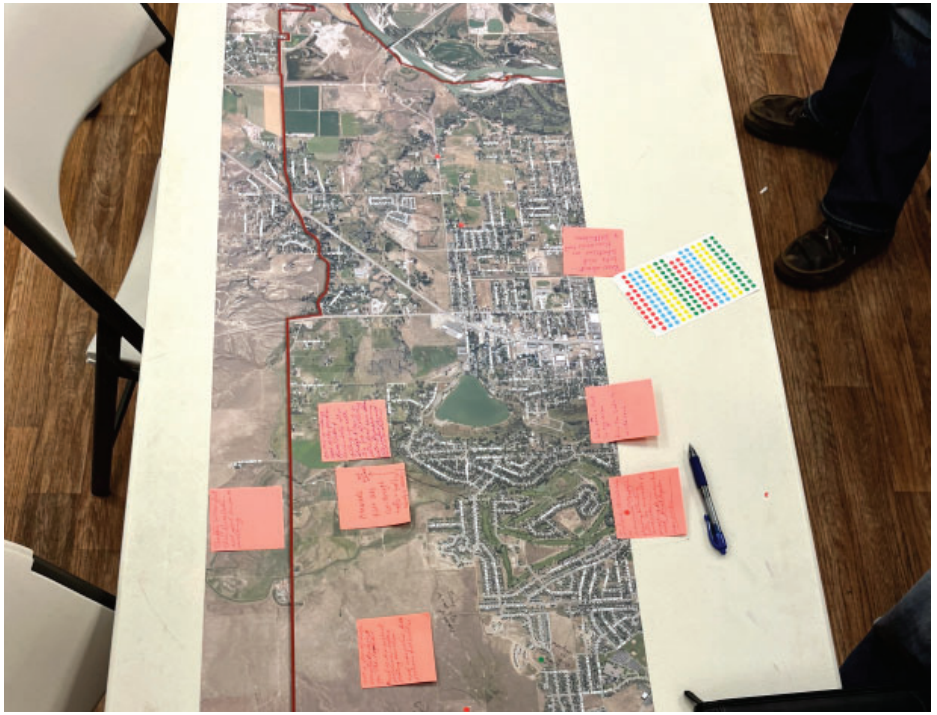

EW SINCE 2006?
IDEA BOARD

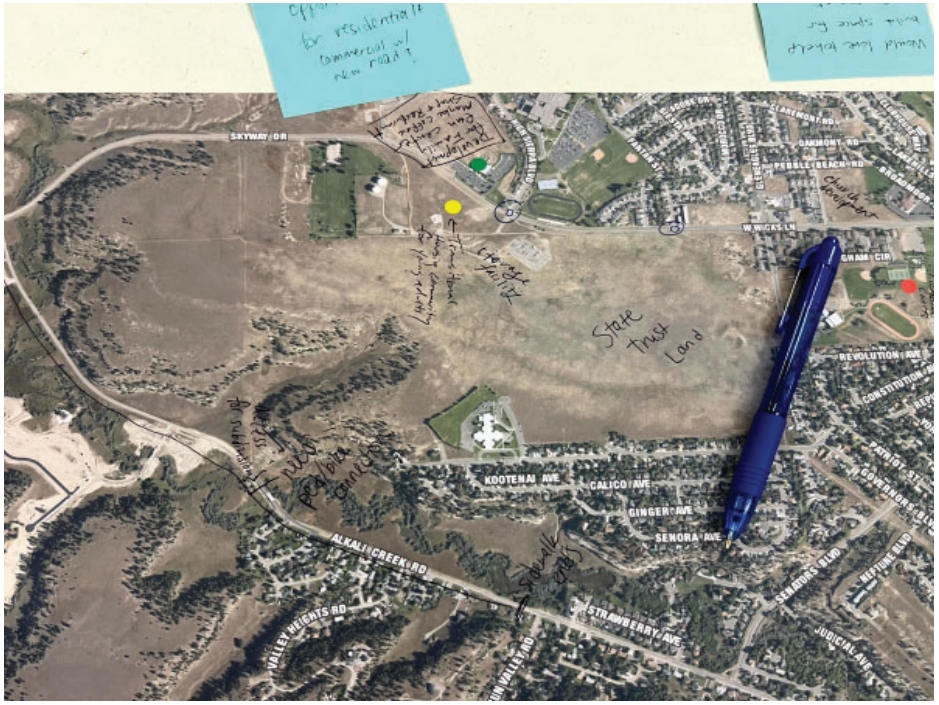

TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY
IDEA BOARD




IDEA BOARD
WHY IS THIS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN IMPORTANT?

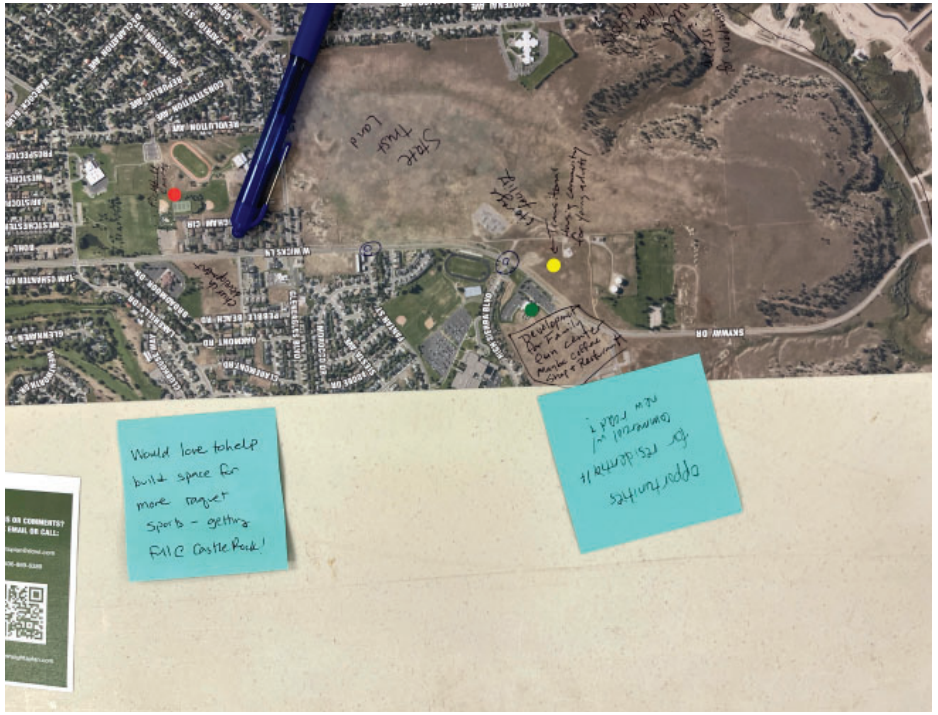

QUIET WATER AVE
WIGWAM TRL
E ALKALI CREEK RD
RIMTOP DR
pockets of commercial in more neighborhoods? places to walk to?




SKYWAY DR
KOOTENAI AVE
CALICO AVE
GINGER AVE
SENORA AVE
ALKALI CREEK RD
STRAWBERRY AVE
VALLEY HEIGHTS RD
SUN VALLEY RD
W WICKS LN
REVOLUTION AVE
CONSTITUTION AVE
SENATORS BLVD
JUDICIAL AVE
State Trust Land


More Pickle ball Courts

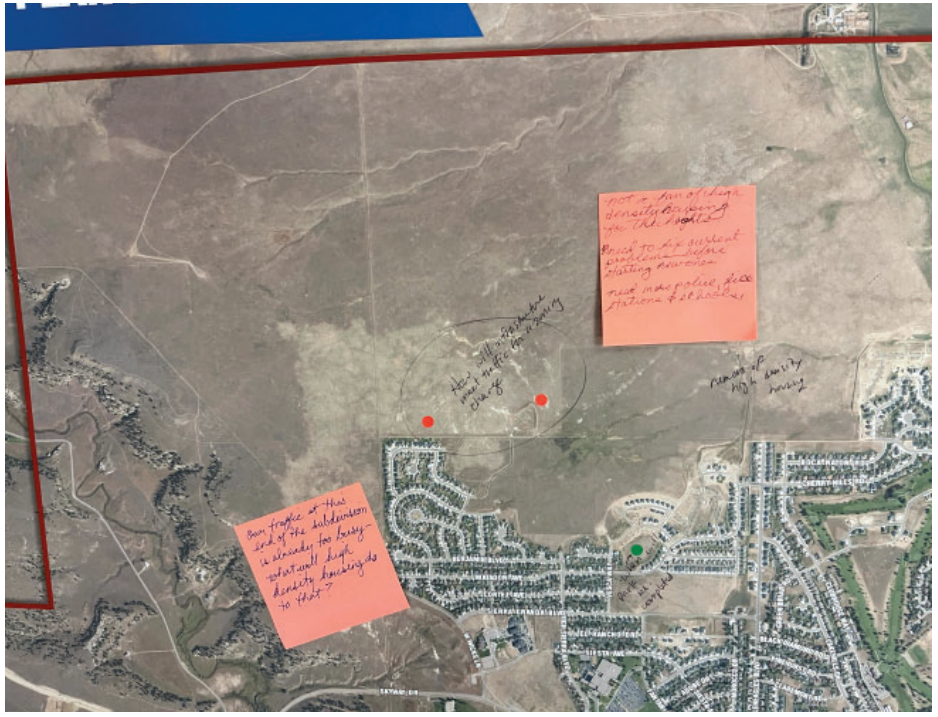

ASTEROID AVE
SAHARA DR
MOON VALLEY RD
TUMBLEWEED DR
INDIAN TRL
TAHRIZ DR
MECCA DR
BAZAAR EXCHANGE
ARONSON AVE
WIGWAM TRL
QUIET WATER AVE
E ALKALI CREEK RD
RIMTOP DR
ERICKSON
W HILLTOP RD
OASIS DR


State Trust Land
SKYWAY DR
W WICKS LN


We need a Park in my area from the Lake to the Lane
Love about bike and sharing on Kuwana trail + pathways


Annandale and Rivers Oaks cut through traffic - traffic calming needed


COMMUNITY & PUBLIC FACILITIES
Billings Heights Neighborhood Boundary
City Boundary
Public Facility
Cemetery
Park
Post Office
School
Fire Station
Medical Center
What community facilities are most important to you? Are there gaps or areas for improvement?
BILLINGSHEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN
Stay informed!
Learn more and share your thoughts by visiting billingsheightsplan.com or scanning the QR code to the right.


Some traffic at this end of the subdivision is already too busy - what will high density housing do to this?

BILLINGS HEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

OPEN HOUSE

SEPTEMBER 25, 2024
5 TO 7 P.M.

Join us to learn more about the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan and help shape the future of the Heights!

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY MONTANA

BILLINGS - YELLOWSTONE COUNTY MPO METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CITY OF Billings

DOWL

INTRODUCTION

START HERE

1. Sign in to let us know you were here!

2. Anyone with a lanyard name tag is with the project team—ask us questions!

3. Display boards with the icon include prompts to help inspire comments, suggestions, and ideas. Use the designated post-it notes, markers, and stickers to share your share your thoughts on the Idea Boards and map print-outs around the room.

4. Scan the QR code at the bottom of this board to visit the website, where you can complete the Engagement Survey, comment on the Interactive Map, and more!



BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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PROJECT OVERVIEW & GOALS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Billings, Yellowstone County, and the Billings-Yellowstone County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) are updating the 2006 Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan to help guide continued development of the Heights over the next 20 years.

The purpose of this open house is to give you an opportunity to help create a vision for the future of your neighborhood.

PROJECT TEAM*

*The project team also includes a Steering Committee of community leaders and Heights residents to help guide the planning process and promote public engagement. A full list of committee members can be found on the project website.

FOCUS AREAS

We'll be looking at the current status and anticipated trends for:

- **Land Use & Development**
- **Community & Public Facilities**
- **Transportation & Connectivity**

BILLINGSHEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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WHY IS THIS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN IMPORTANT?

As the Billings Heights continues to grow, it's important to have a roadmap for future land use and transportation planning that incorporates technical data/analysis, public participation, and practical implementation strategies.

The updated plan will serve as a tool for making informed decisions about the future of the Billings Heights that reflects community needs.

It will also update the neighborhood's Future Land Use Map. Per the new Montana Land Use Planning Act, this will help inform the city-wide Growth Policy and Projected Land Use Map to help guide future zoning and development considerations.



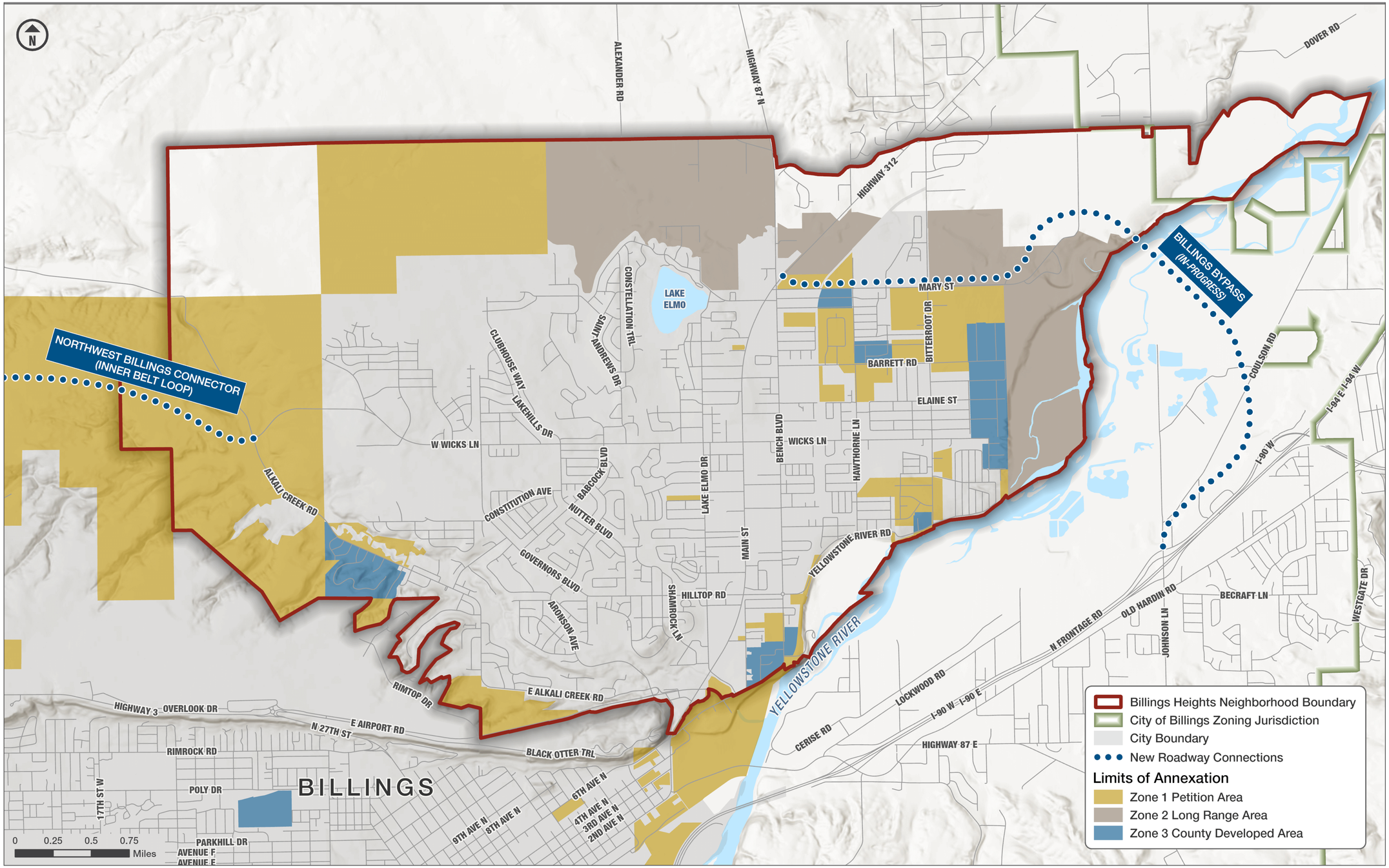
What is <u>your</u> vision for the Billings Heights over the next 20 years?

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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Learn more and share your thoughts by visiting <u>billingsheightsplan.com</u> or scanning the QR code to the right.

BOUNDARY FOR NEIGHORHOOD PLAN UPDATE



WHAT'S NEW SINCE 2006?

Population growth (the Heights now houses about 1/3 of Billings' total population).

"Project Re:Code" established new zoning requirements with the purpose of adapting to current needs, encouraging development, and preserving neighborhoods.

Transportation system developments

- Bench Boulevard
- Skyway Drive
- Billings Bypass (in-progress)

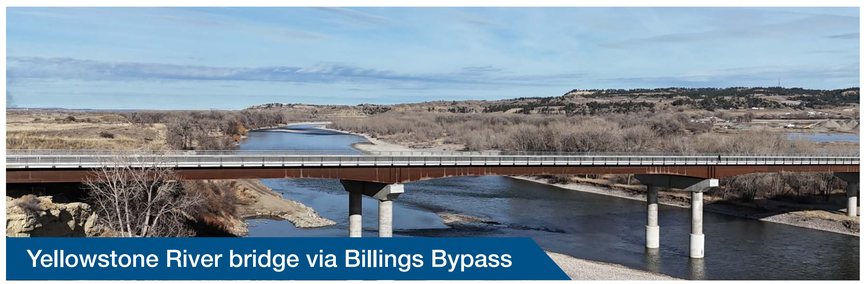
New school, parks, neighborhoods

- Medicine Crow Middle School
- High Sierra Dog Park, Dover Park, etc.
- Oasis Water Park
- New health care facilites


Skyway Drive



High Sierra Dog Park


Yellowstone River bridge via Billings Bypass


Oasis Water Park



Heights Clinic Family Medicine

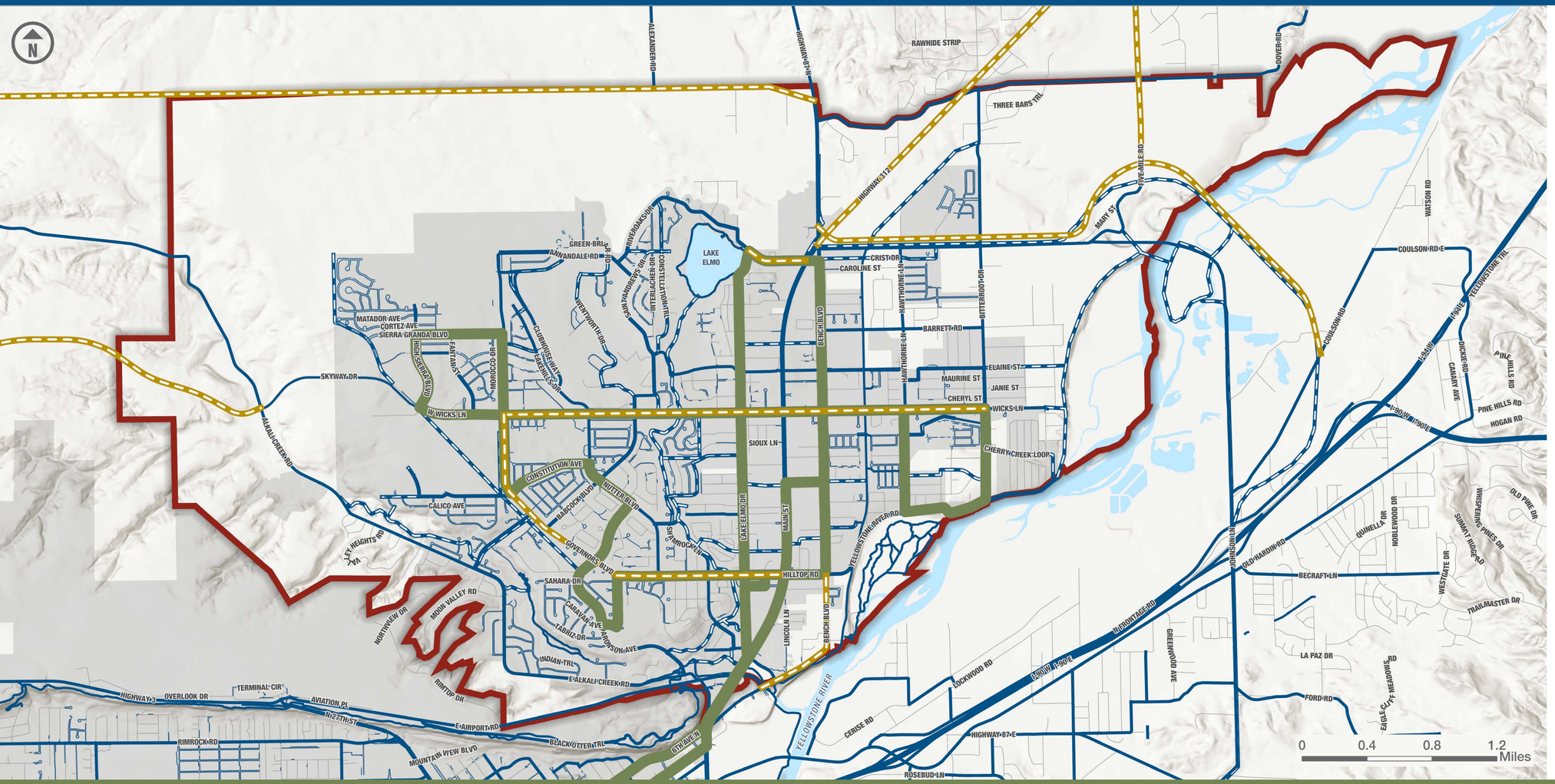
What other improvements have you seen in the Heights since 2006? What has stayed the same?

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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Learn more and share your thoughts by visiting billingsheightsplan.com or scanning the QR code to the right.

TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY



Billings Heights Neighborhood Boundary

City Boundary

Transportation Route

Planned Road Project
(new construction or improvements)

Proposed Bike/ Pedestrian Route

Existing Bike/ Pedestrian Route

Existing Transit Route

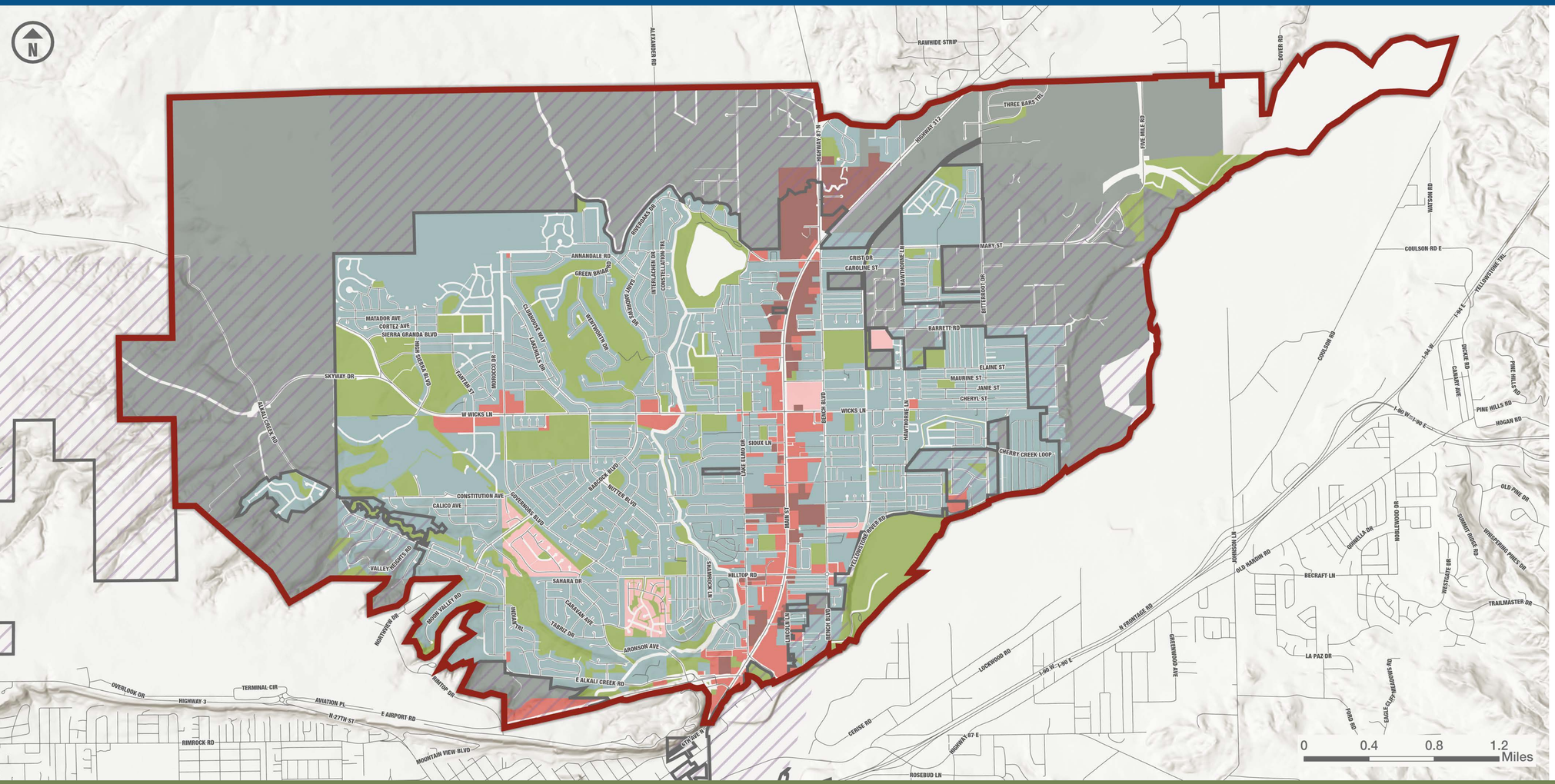
What are the biggest transportation issues impacting the Heights?

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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CURRENT LAND USE



- Billings Heights Neighborhood Boundary
- City Boundary

*Zoning Classification**

- Commercial
- Mixed-Use
- Planned Development
- Residential Neighborhood
- Rural Residential/ Agriculture
- Public and Open Space

**Zoning classifications on this map represent categories of zoning districts. Each classification includes multiple zoning districts to show a simplified view of current land use in the Heights.*

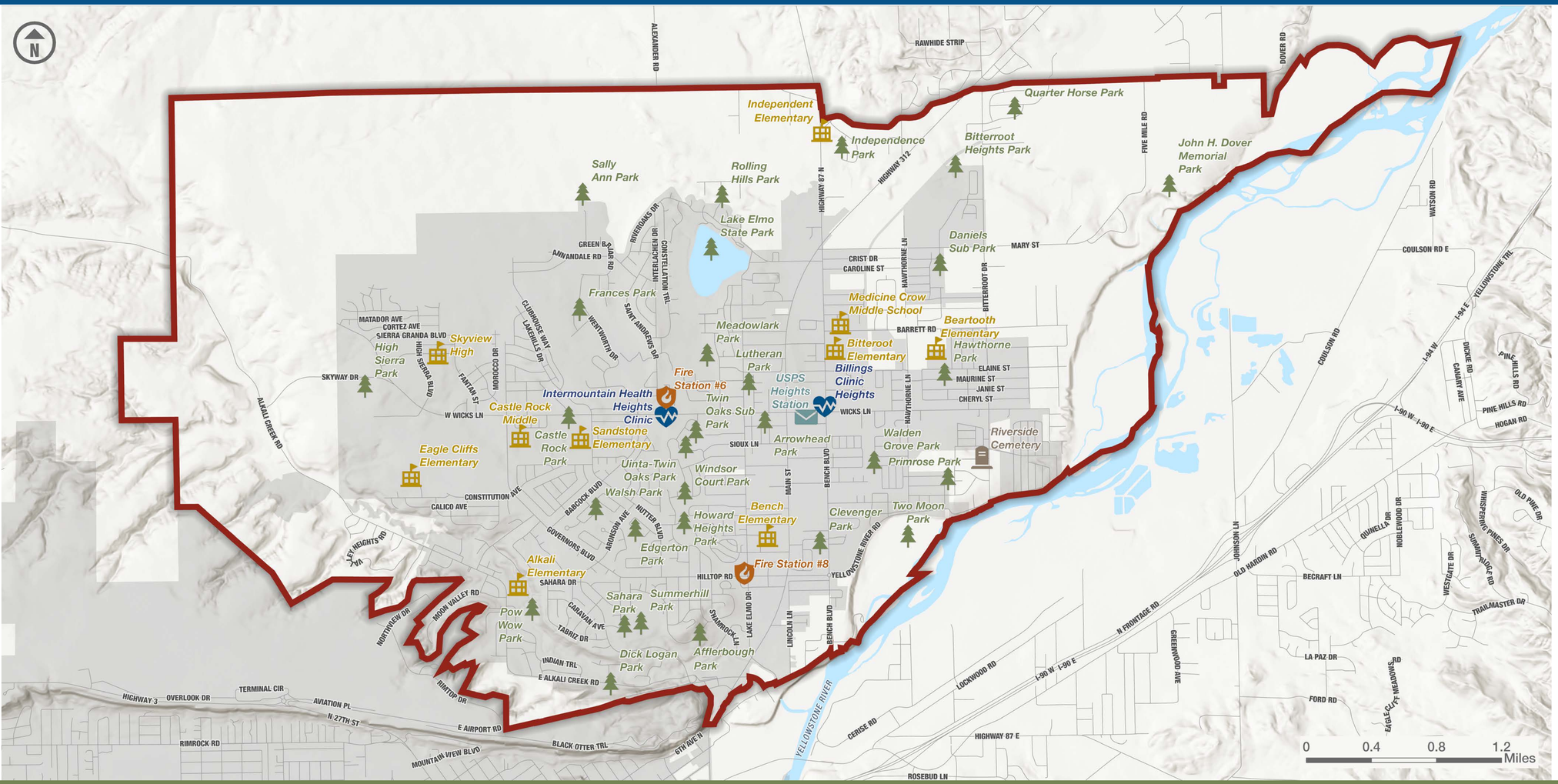
Where would you like to see residential and commercial growth in the Heights?

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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COMMUNITY & PUBLIC FACILITIES



Billings Heights Neighborhood Boundary

City Boundary

Public Facility

- Cemetery
- Park
- Post Office
- School
- Fire Station
- Medical Center

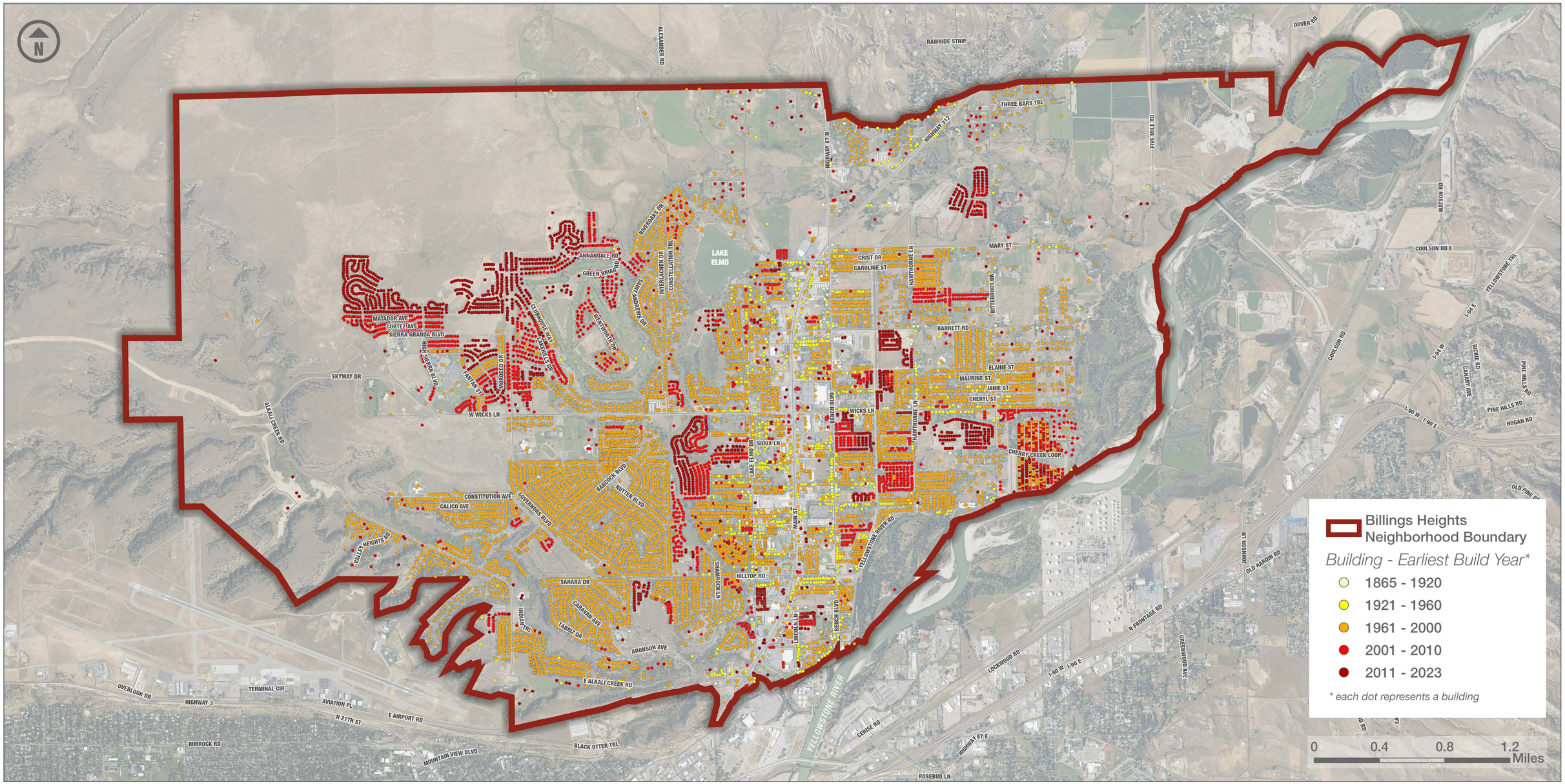
What community facilities are most important to you? Are there gaps or areas for improvement?

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HEIGHTS DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME



PROJECT TIMELINE

WE ARE HERE

2024

SUMMER

- Assemble and Meet with Steering Committee
- Research/Data Gathering

FALL

- Public Engagement Kick-Off
- Research/Data Gathering
- Public Open House #1
- Stakeholder and Steering Committee Meetings

WINTER

- Draft Document
- Public Open House #2
- Stakeholder and Steering Committee Meetings

2025

SPRING

- Revise Document
- Stakeholder and Steering Committee Meetings
- Finalize/Adopt Document

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Stay Informed!

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KEY TERMS

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN: An urban planning approach that helps shape new and existing neighborhoods. Neighborhood plans typically involve a clear vision and goals, recommendations for future development and implementation, and public participation to make sure the plan reflects the community's needs and values.

ZONING: Local laws or regulations that govern how property can and cannot be used in certain areas. Zoning districts are typically more specific than land use designations in Future Land Use maps. For example, Billings zoning districts include: N3 Suburban Neighborhood; CMU1 Corridor Mixed-Use; P1 Open Space, Parks, Recreation; and many others.

LIMITS OF ANNEXATION: Areas within these limits are under consideration to be annexed into the City of Billings in the future. The City and Yellowstone County define these areas to strategically and efficiently manage growth and delivery of municipal services.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP: Provides recommendations for future land uses within an area. Unlike zoning districts, future land use designations are not law and do not impact current uses on properties. Instead, the Future Land Use Map is a high-level view of what land uses the community envisions in different areas of the neighborhood. This map can highlight opportunities for future growth and development.

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

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GET INVOLVED

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Your feedback is essential in creating a Neighborhood Plan that represents the community's vision.

Help spread the word by sharing the QR codes on the right with your neighbors!

1

COMPLETE THE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY*

**(Paper versions of this survey are available upon request.)*

2

ADD COMMENTS TO THE INTERACTIVE MAP

BILLINGSHEIGHTS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Stay Informed!

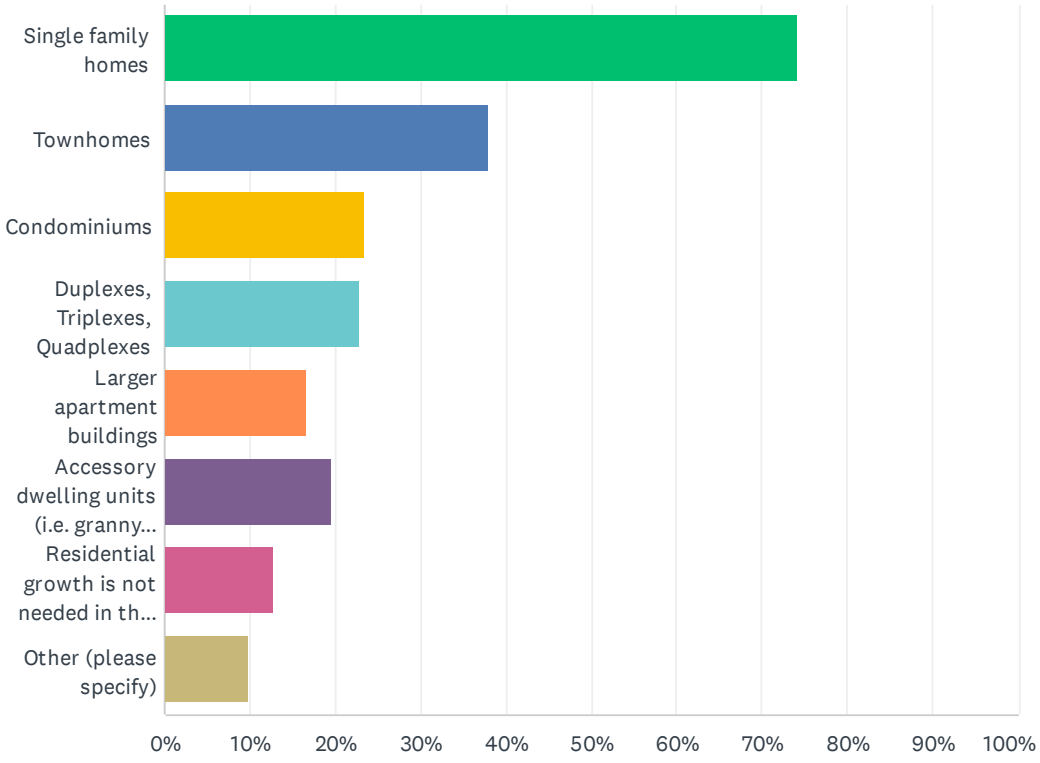
Learn more and share your thoughts by visiting billingsheightsplan.com or scanning the QR code to the right.

Q1 In a sentence, please describe your vision for the Heights over the next 20 years.

Answered: 130 Skipped: 3

Q2 Which types of residential growth does the Heights need? (Select all that apply)

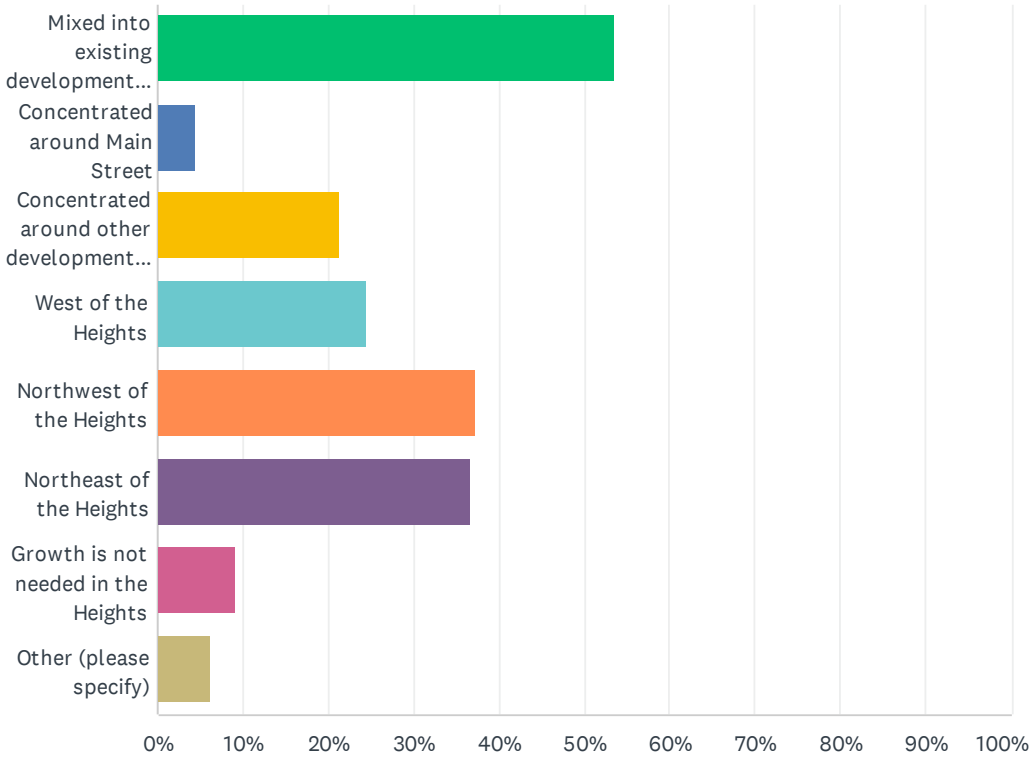
Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single family homes	74.24%	98
Townhomes	37.88%	50
Condominiums	23.48%	31
Duplexes, Triplexes, Quadplexes	22.73%	30
Larger apartment buildings	16.67%	22
Accessory dwelling units (i.e. granny flats, guest houses, etc. that are often used to generate rental income etc.)	19.70%	26
Residential growth is not needed in the Heights	12.88%	17
Other (please specify)	9.85%	13
Total Respondents: 132		

Q3 Where should residential growth occur in the Heights area? (Select all locations that you think make sense for the Heights)

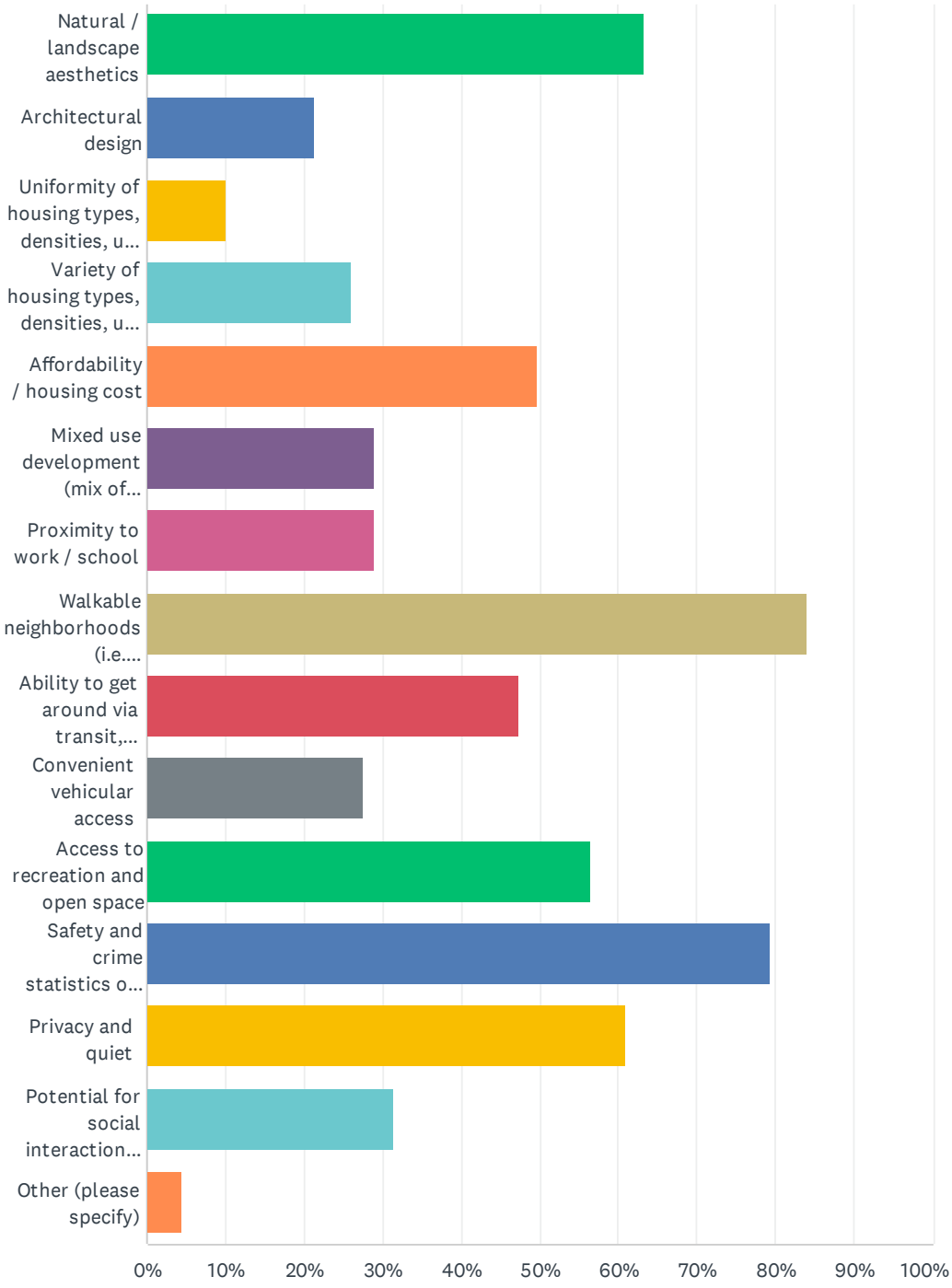
Answered: 131 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Mixed into existing development areas (infill) or redevelopment	53.44%	70
Concentrated around Main Street	4.58%	6
Concentrated around other development centers / nodes	21.37%	28
West of the Heights	24.43%	32
Northwest of the Heights	37.40%	49
Northeast of the Heights	36.64%	48
Growth is not needed in the Heights	9.16%	12
Other (please specify)	6.11%	8
Total Respondents: 131		

Q4 What neighborhood characteristics are most important to you? (Select all that are most important to you)

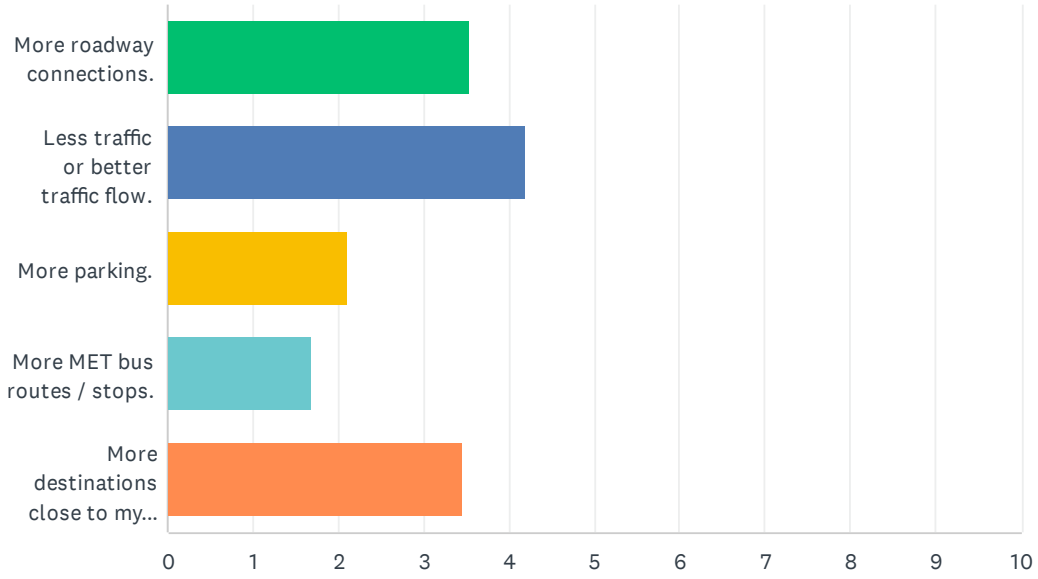
Answered: 131 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Natural / landscape aesthetics	63.36%	83
Architectural design	21.37%	28
Uniformity of housing types, densities, unit sizes, etc.	9.92%	13
Variety of housing types, densities, unit sizes, etc.	25.95%	34
Affordability / housing cost	49.62%	65
Mixed use development (mix of commercial and residential uses)	29.01%	38
Proximity to work / school	29.01%	38
Walkable neighborhoods (i.e. sidewalks, trees, street lights, etc.)	83.97%	110
Ability to get around via transit, walking, biking, etc.	47.33%	62
Convenient vehicular access	27.48%	36
Access to recreation and open space	56.49%	74
Safety and crime statistics of the neighborhood	79.39%	104
Privacy and quiet	61.07%	80
Potential for social interaction with neighbors	31.30%	41
Other (please specify)	4.58%	6
Total Respondents: 131		

Q5 When it comes to getting around the Heights and visiting your preferred destinations, what types of access would be most helpful to you? (Use the arrows to rank the options below with the item at the top being the most helpful and the one at the bottom being the least helpful)

Answered: 131 Skipped: 2



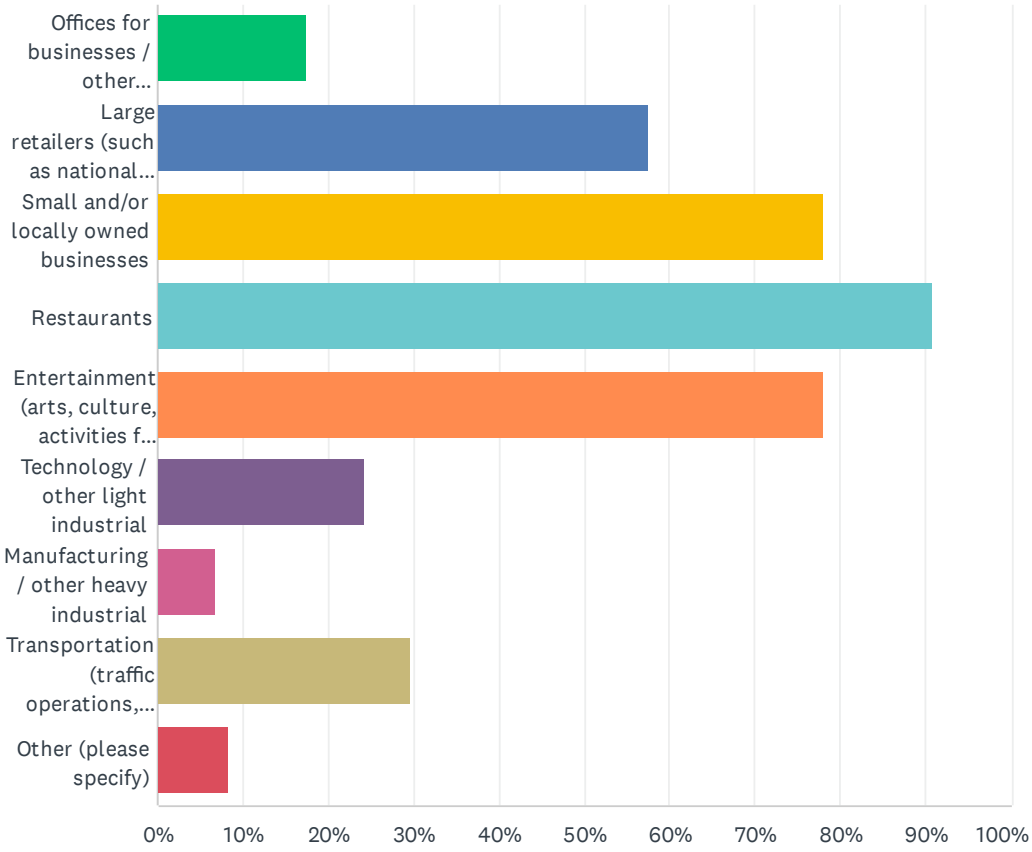
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
More roadway connections.	16.03% 21	38.17% 50	32.82% 43	10.69% 14	2.29% 3	131	3.55
Less traffic or better traffic flow.	45.80% 60	32.82% 43	17.56% 23	3.82% 5	0.00% 0	131	4.21
More parking.	1.53% 2	4.58% 6	21.37% 28	48.09% 63	24.43% 32	131	2.11
More MET bus routes / stops.	0.00% 0	7.63% 10	9.92% 13	25.95% 34	56.49% 74	131	1.69
More destinations close to my neighborhood (i.e., parks, shops, health services, etc.)	36.64% 48	16.79% 22	18.32% 24	11.45% 15	16.79% 22	131	3.45

Q6 Additional comments about housing and land use in the Heights:

Answered: 95 Skipped: 38

Q7 Which types of commercial and economic growth does the Heights need? (Select all that you think are most important)

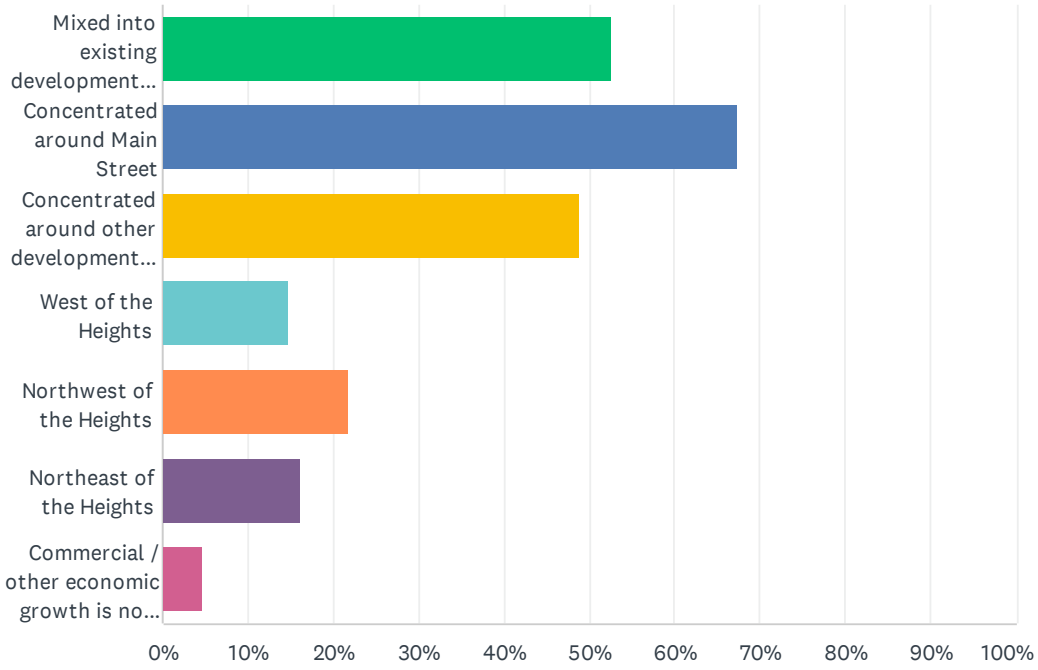
Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Offices for businesses / other organizations	17.42%	23
Large retailers (such as national chains)	57.58%	76
Small and/or locally owned businesses	78.03%	103
Restaurants	90.91%	120
Entertainment (arts, culture, activities for families, nightlife, etc)	78.03%	103
Technology / other light industrial	24.24%	32
Manufacturing / other heavy industrial	6.82%	9
Transportation (traffic operations, connectivity, pedestrian and bicycle access)	29.55%	39
Other (please specify)	8.33%	11
Total Respondents: 132		

Q8 Where should commercial and economic growth occur in the Heights area? (Select all locations that you think make sense for the Heights)

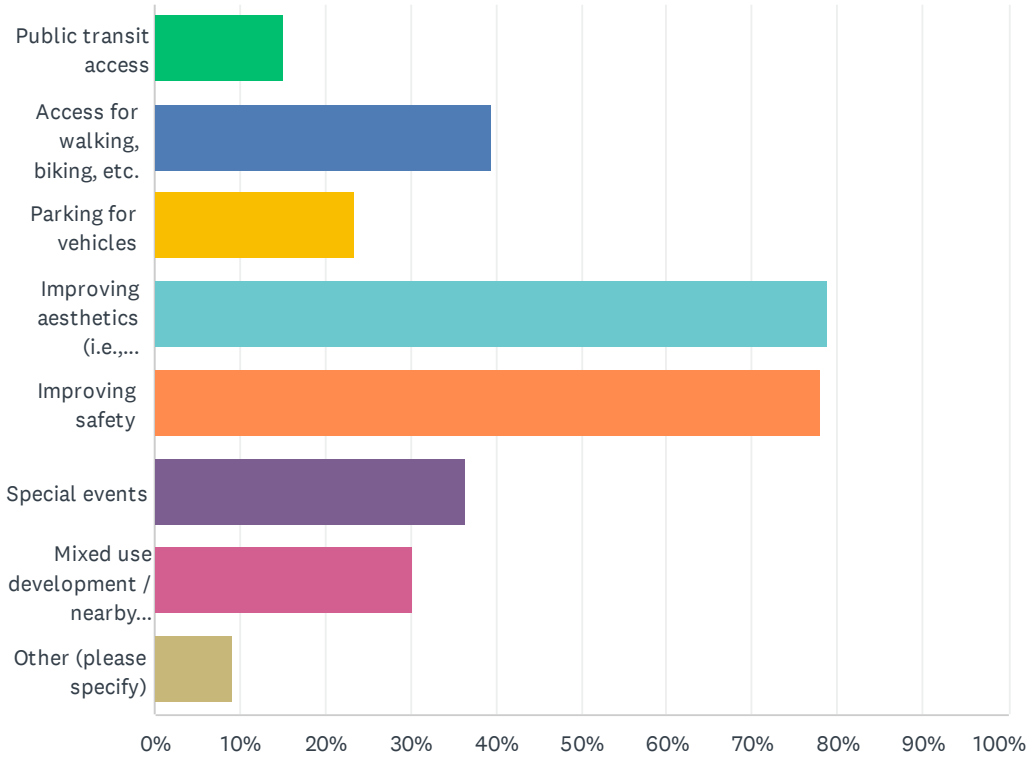
Answered: 129 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Mixed into existing development areas (infill) or redevelopment	52.71%	68
Concentrated around Main Street	67.44%	87
Concentrated around other development centers / nodes	48.84%	63
West of the Heights	14.73%	19
Northwest of the Heights	21.71%	28
Northeast of the Heights	16.28%	21
Commercial / other economic growth is not needed in the Heights	4.65%	6
Total Respondents: 129		

Q9 What factors are most important for revitalizing Main Street and/or other commercial areas in the Heights? (Select all that you think are most important)

Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



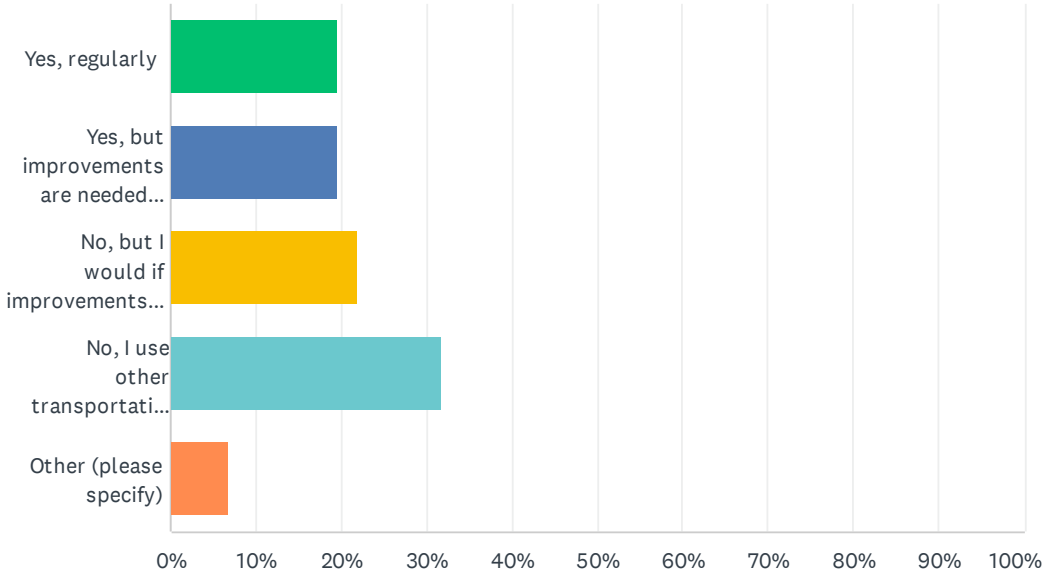
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Public transit access	15.15%	20
Access for walking, biking, etc.	39.39%	52
Parking for vehicles	23.48%	31
Improving aesthetics (i.e., greenery, signage, landscaping, etc.)	78.79%	104
Improving safety	78.03%	103
Special events	36.36%	48
Mixed use development / nearby residential opportunities	30.30%	40
Other (please specify)	9.09%	12
Total Respondents: 132		

Q10 Additional comments about economic development in the Heights:

Answered: 79 Skipped: 54

Q11 Do you walk, bike, or use other non-motorized transportation modes?

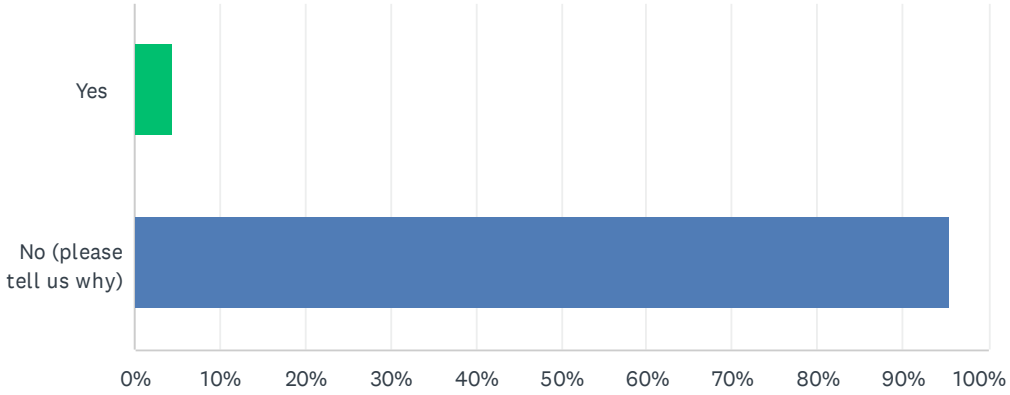
Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, regularly	19.70%	26
Yes, but improvements are needed (such as access / connectivity, types of facilities, maintenance, etc)	19.70%	26
No, but I would if improvements were made	21.97%	29
No, I use other transportation and am unlikely to use non-motorized modes	31.82%	42
Other (please specify)	6.82%	9
TOTAL		132

Q12 Do you use MET Transit?

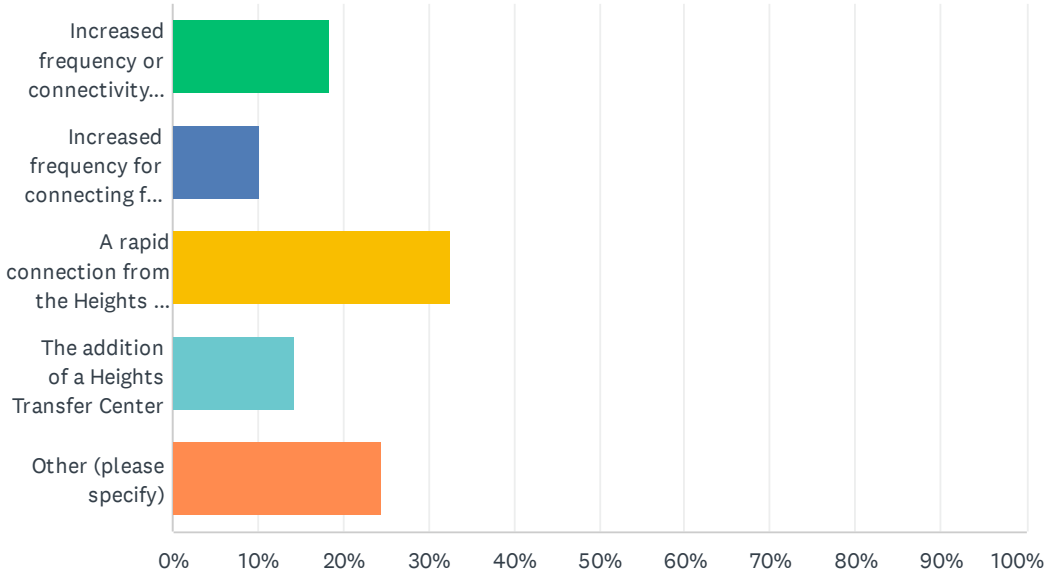
Answered: 131 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	4.58%	6
No (please tell us why)	95.42%	125
TOTAL		131

Q13 If you could change one thing about MET Transit, what would it be?

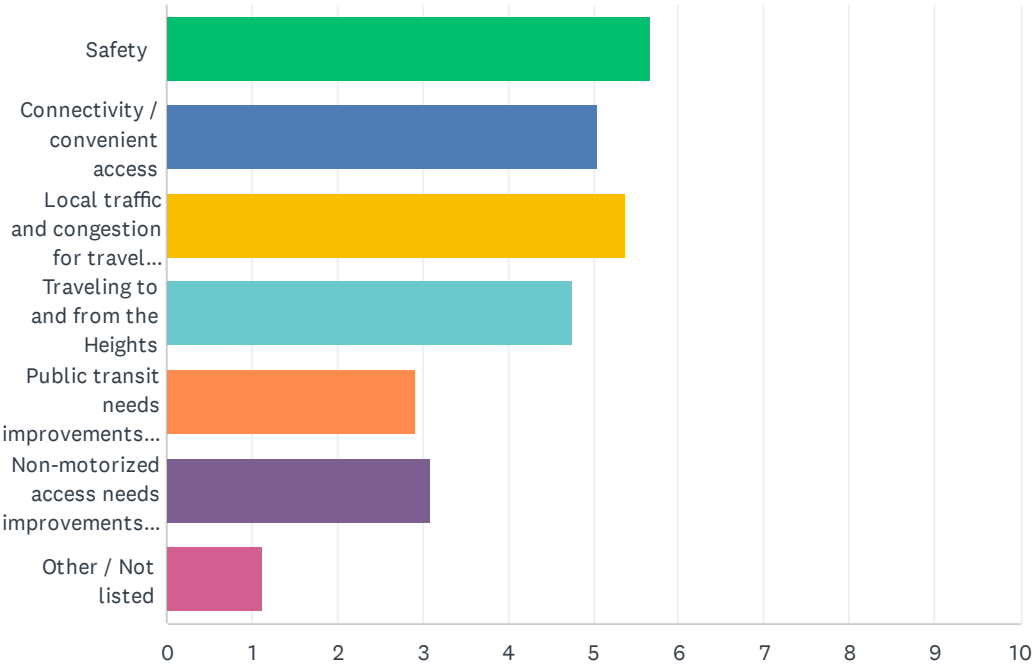
Answered: 126 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Increased frequency or connectivity to other areas of the Heights	18.25%	23
Increased frequency for connecting from the Heights to Downtown	10.32%	13
A rapid connection from the Heights to the West End	32.54%	41
The addition of a Heights Transfer Center	14.29%	18
Other (please specify)	24.60%	31
TOTAL		126

Q14 Please rank the most significant transportation issues currently impacting the Heights (Use the arrows to rank the options below with the item at the top being the most helpful and the one at the bottom being the least helpful):

Answered: 130 Skipped: 3



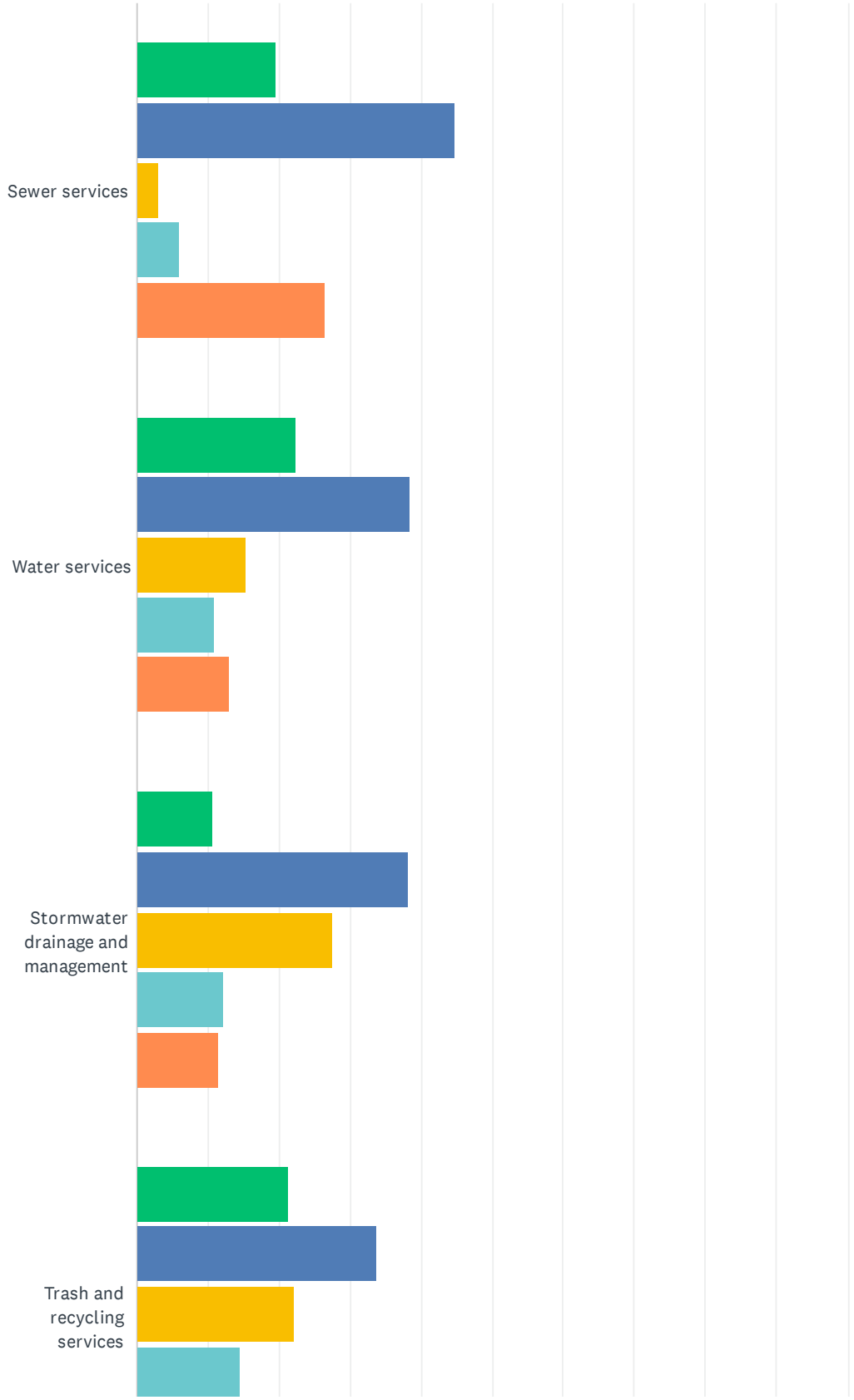
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL	SCORE
Safety	38.46% 50	19.23% 25	23.85% 31	10.77% 14	5.38% 7	2.31% 3	0.00% 0	130	5.68
Connectivity / convenient access	15.38% 20	25.38% 33	25.38% 33	21.54% 28	6.92% 9	5.38% 7	0.00% 0	130	5.05
Local traffic and congestion for travel within the Heights	24.62% 32	26.15% 34	24.62% 32	14.62% 19	7.69% 10	2.31% 3	0.00% 0	130	5.38
Traveling to and from the Heights	13.85% 18	22.31% 29	12.31% 16	33.85% 44	13.08% 17	3.08% 4	1.54% 2	130	4.75
Public transit needs improvements (i.e. more bus stops/routes)	2.31% 3	1.54% 2	3.85% 5	9.23% 12	45.38% 59	36.15% 47	1.54% 2	130	2.92
Non-motorized access needs improvements (i.e. bicycle/walking paths)	4.62% 6	5.38% 7	10.00% 13	10.00% 13	18.46% 24	47.69% 62	3.85% 5	130	3.09
Other / Not listed	0.77% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.08% 4	3.08% 4	93.08% 121	130	1.14

Q15 Additional comments about transportation in the Heights:

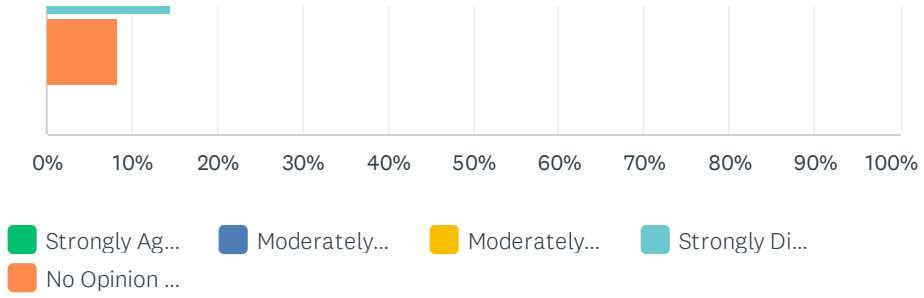
Answered: 82 Skipped: 51

Q16 INFRASTRUCTURE: The Heights is adequately served by:

Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



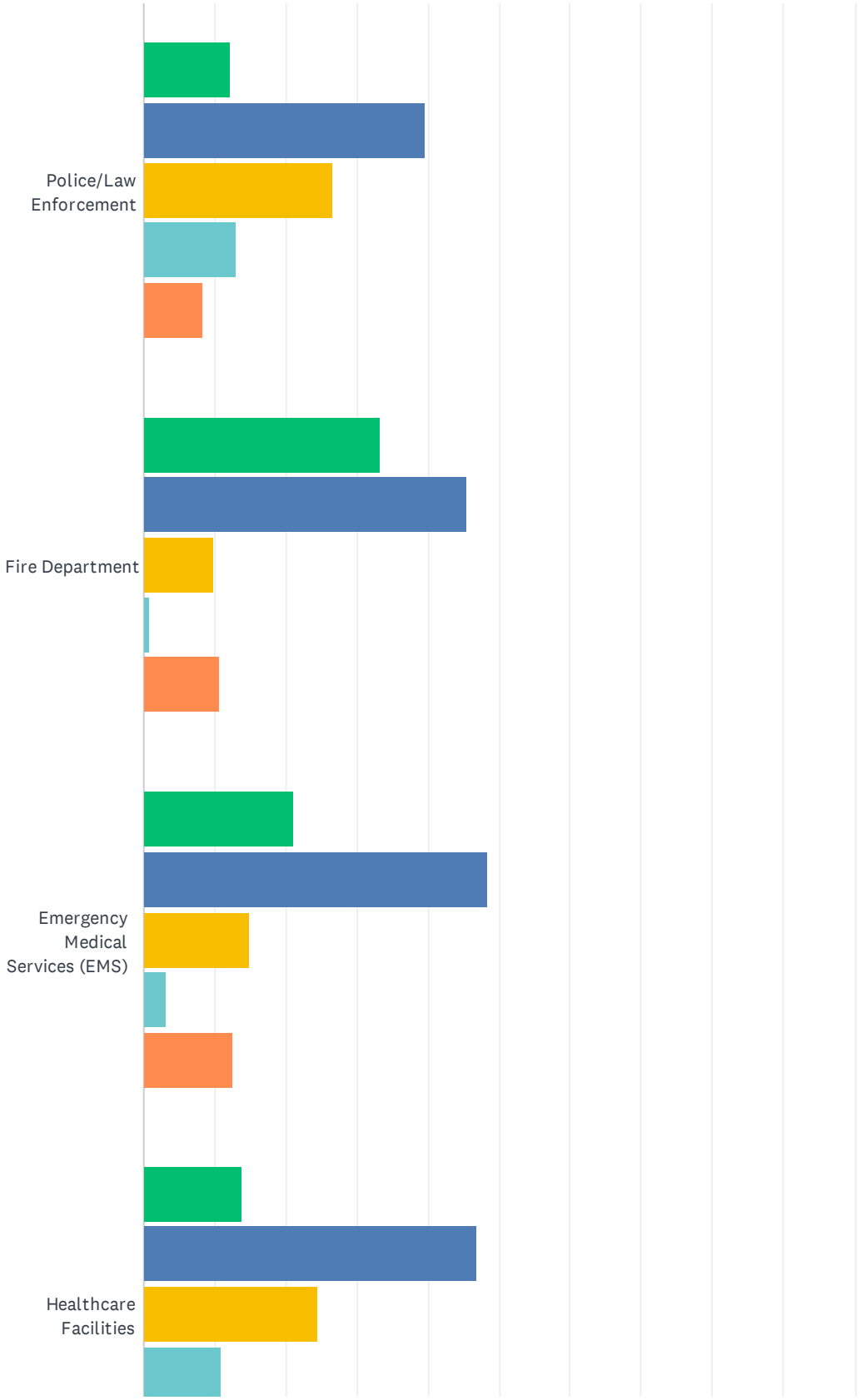
Community Engagement Survey



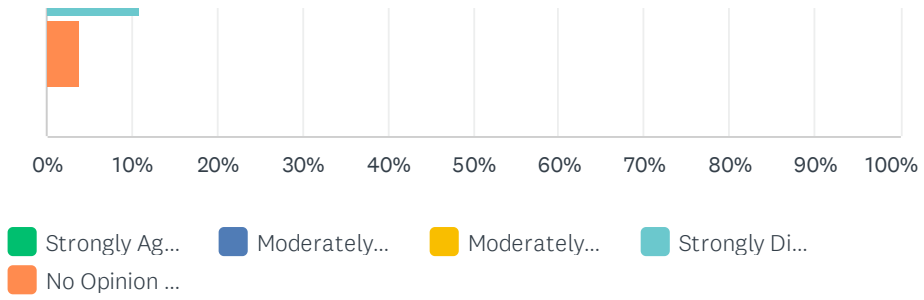
	STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NO OPINION / NA	TOTAL
Sewer services	19.70% 26	44.70% 59	3.03% 4	6.06% 8	26.52% 35	132
Water services	22.31% 29	38.46% 50	15.38% 20	10.77% 14	13.08% 17	130
Stormwater drainage and management	10.69% 14	38.17% 50	27.48% 36	12.21% 16	11.45% 15	131
Trash and recycling services	21.37% 28	33.59% 44	22.14% 29	14.50% 19	8.40% 11	131

Q17 PUBLIC SAFETY: Currently, the Heights is adequately served by:

Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



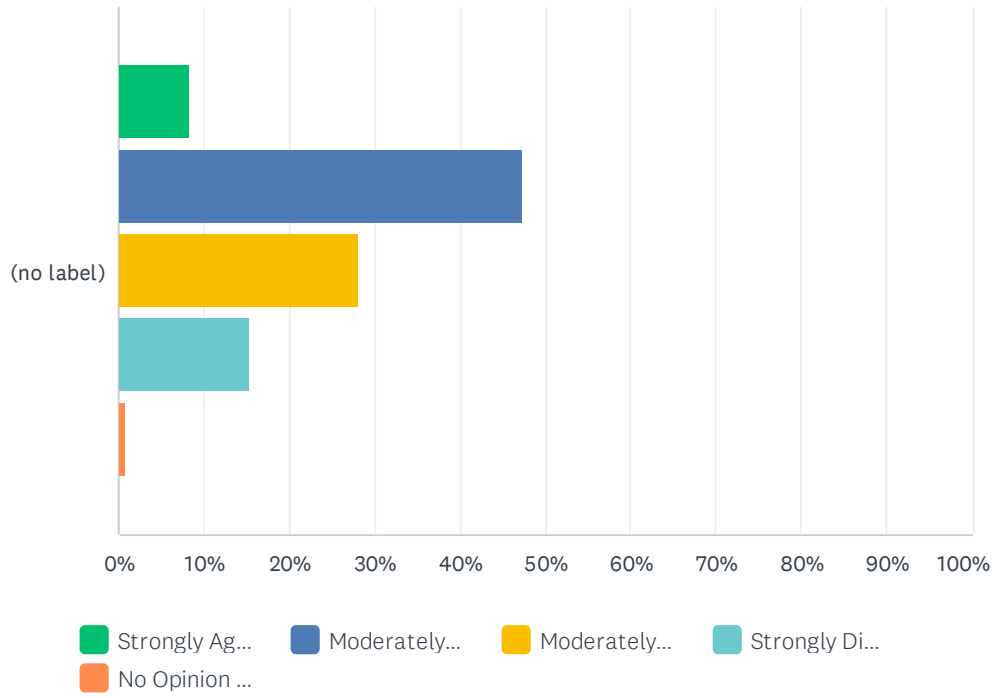
Community Engagement Survey



	STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NO OPINION / NA	TOTAL
Police/Law Enforcement	12.21% 16	39.69% 52	26.72% 35	12.98% 17	8.40% 11	131
Fire Department	33.33% 44	45.45% 60	9.85% 13	0.76% 1	10.61% 14	132
Emergency Medical Services (EMS)	21.09% 27	48.44% 62	14.84% 19	3.13% 4	12.50% 16	128
Healthcare Facilities	13.85% 18	46.92% 61	24.62% 32	10.77% 14	3.85% 5	130

Q18 PUBLIC SAFETY: The Heights is a safe area of Billings

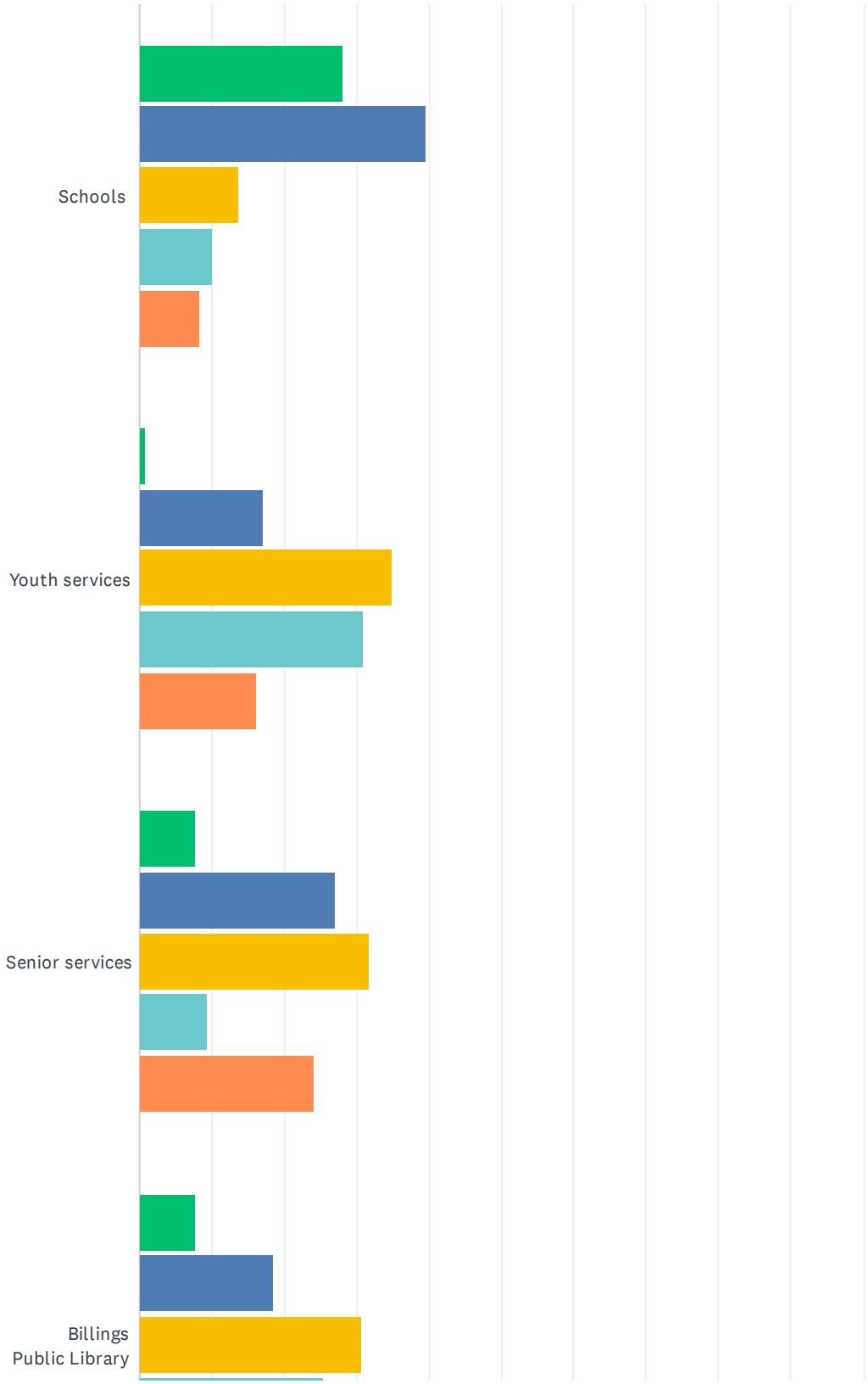
Answered: 131 Skipped: 2

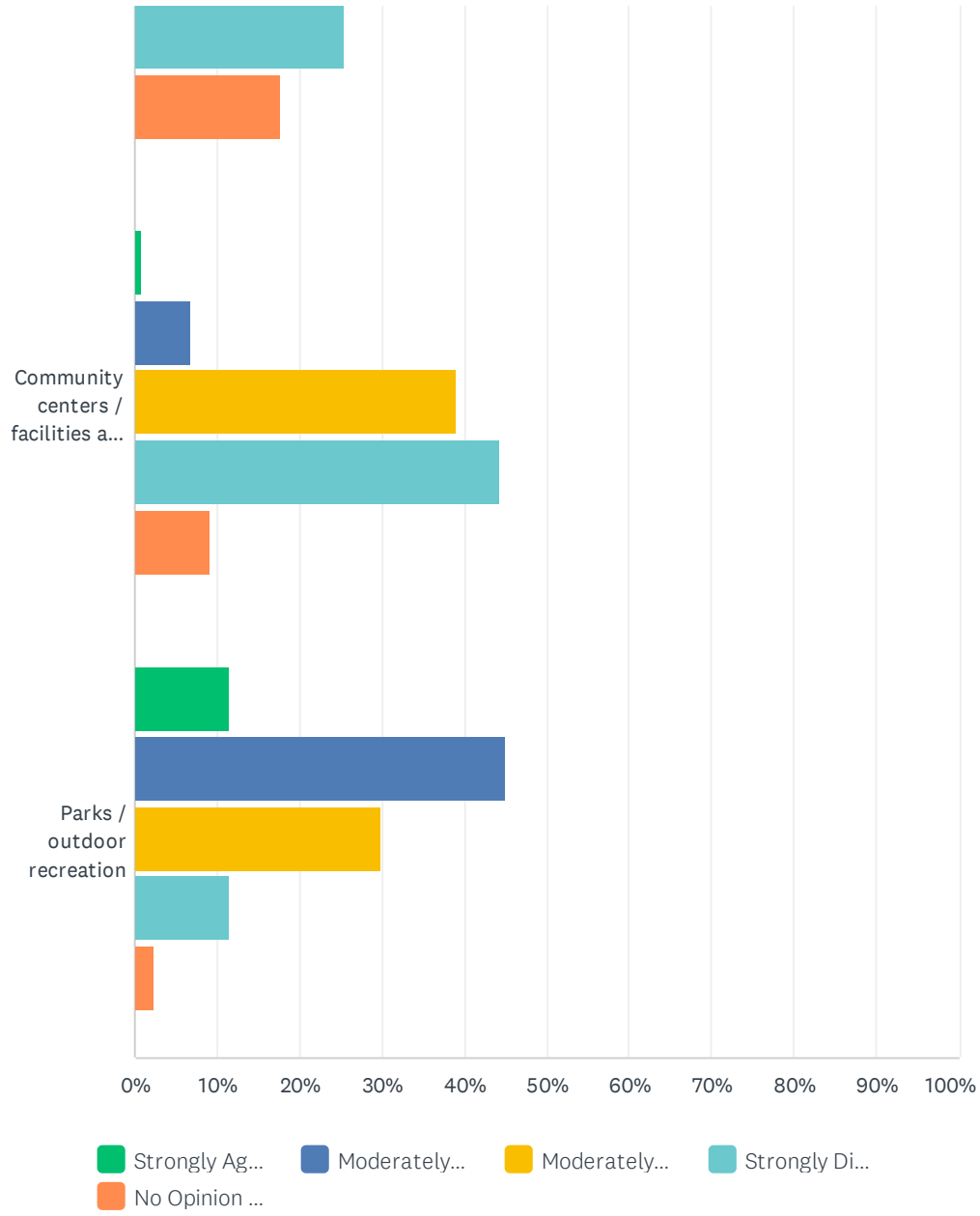


	STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NO OPINION / NA	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	8.40% 11	47.33% 62	28.24% 37	15.27% 20	0.76% 1	131	2.53

Q19 COMMUNITY FACILITIES: Currently, the Heights is adequately served by:

Answered: 132 Skipped: 1

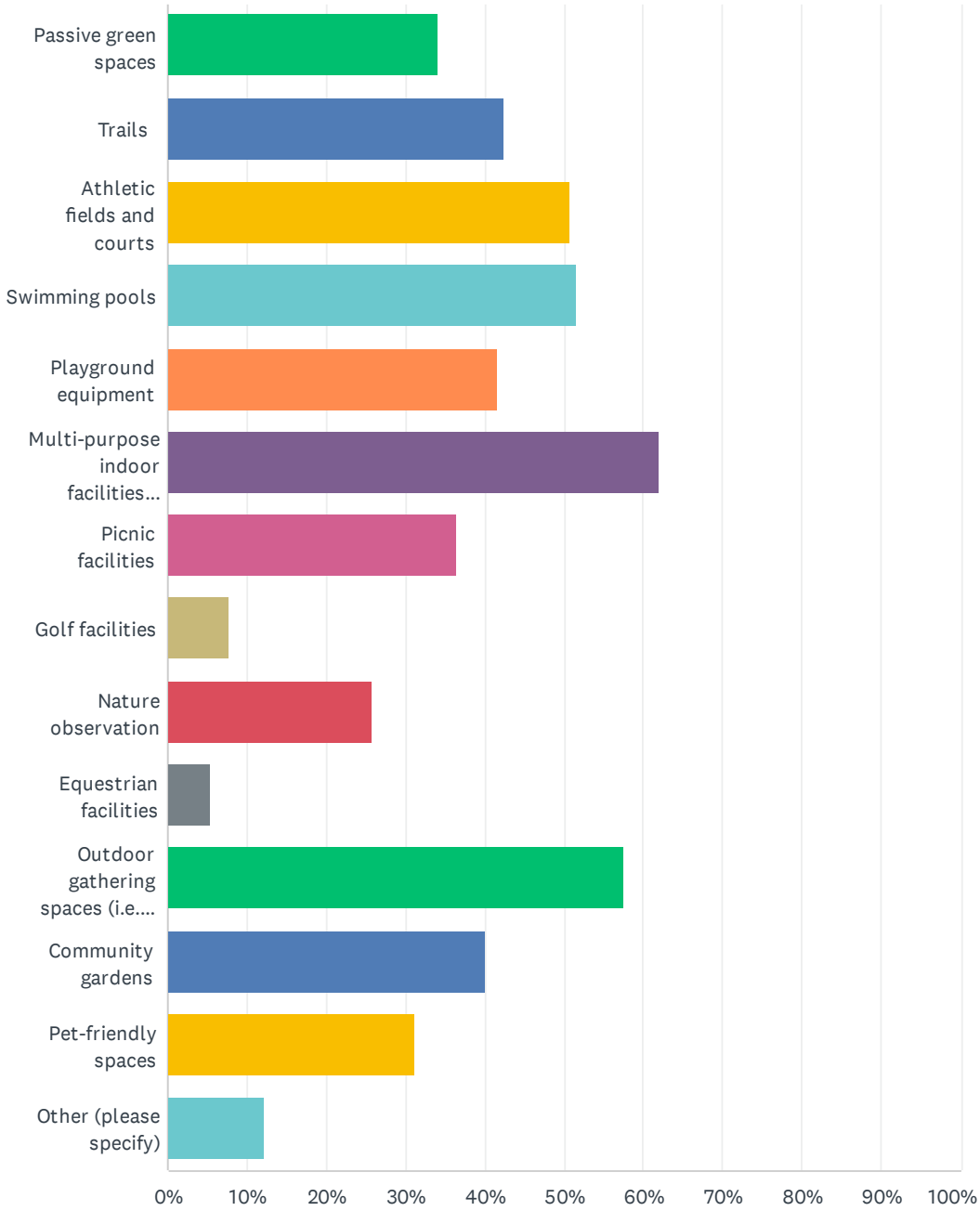




	STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NO OPINION / NA	TOTAL
Schools	28.24% 37	39.69% 52	13.74% 18	9.92% 13	8.40% 11	131
Youth services	0.78% 1	17.05% 22	34.88% 45	31.01% 40	16.28% 21	129
Senior services	7.75% 10	27.13% 35	31.78% 41	9.30% 12	24.03% 31	129
Billings Public Library	7.69% 10	18.46% 24	30.77% 40	25.38% 33	17.69% 23	130
Community centers / facilities and programs for all ages	0.76% 1	6.87% 9	38.93% 51	44.27% 58	9.16% 12	131
Parks / outdoor recreation	11.45% 15	45.04% 59	29.77% 39	11.45% 15	2.29% 3	131

Q20 PARKS & RECREATION: Which facilities are most needed at parks in the Heights? (Select all that are important to you)

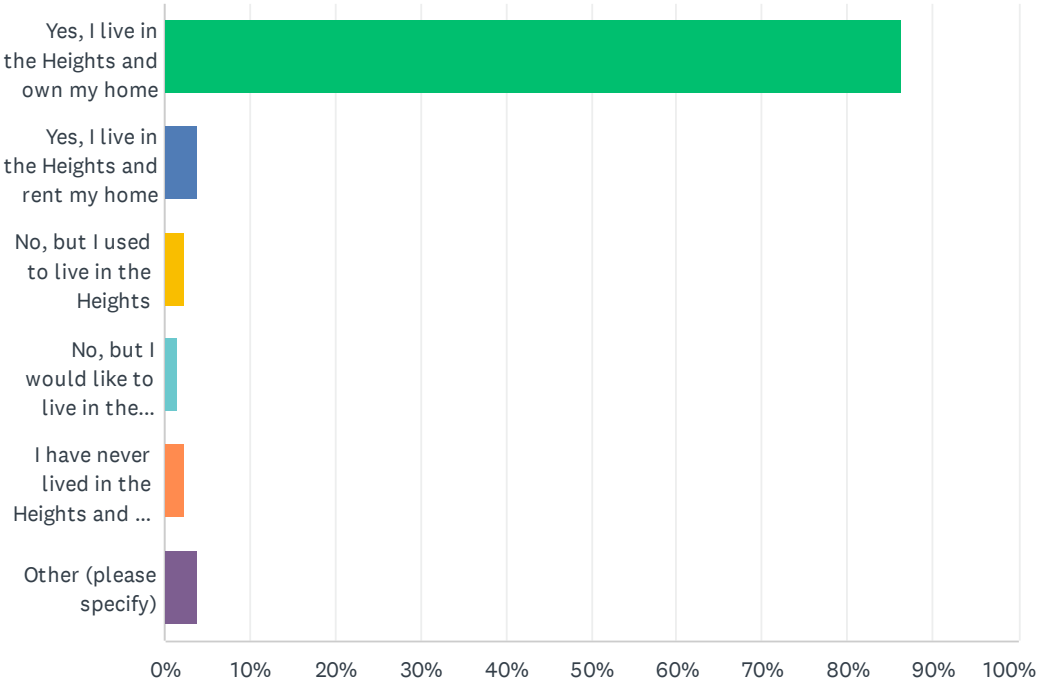
Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Passive green spaces	34.09%	45
Trails	42.42%	56
Athletic fields and courts	50.76%	67
Swimming pools	51.52%	68
Playground equipment	41.67%	55
Multi-purpose indoor facilities (i.e., events, meetings, etc)	62.12%	82
Picnic facilities	36.36%	48
Golf facilities	7.58%	10
Nature observation	25.76%	34
Equestrian facilities	5.30%	7
Outdoor gathering spaces (i.e., amphitheater)	57.58%	76
Community gardens	40.15%	53
Pet-friendly spaces	31.06%	41
Other (please specify)	12.12%	16
Total Respondents: 132		

Q21 Do you live in the Heights?

Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



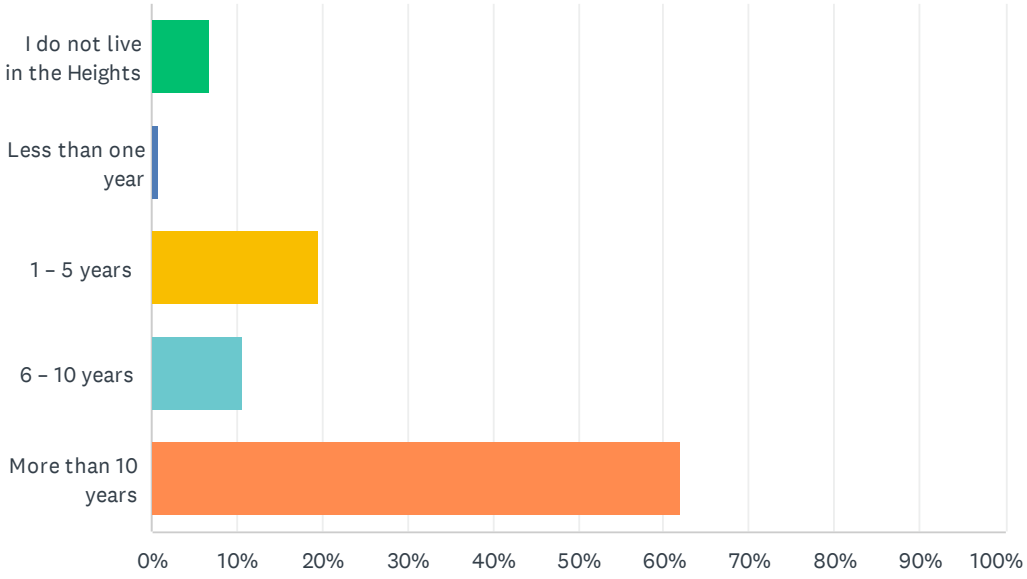
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, I live in the Heights and own my home	86.36%	114
Yes, I live in the Heights and rent my home	3.79%	5
No, but I used to live in the Heights	2.27%	3
No, but I would like to live in the Heights in the future	1.52%	2
I have never lived in the Heights and am unlikely to	2.27%	3
Other (please specify)	3.79%	5
TOTAL		132

Q22 Why do you live in the Heights? Or, why not?

Answered: 126 Skipped: 7

Q23 How long have you lived in the Heights area?

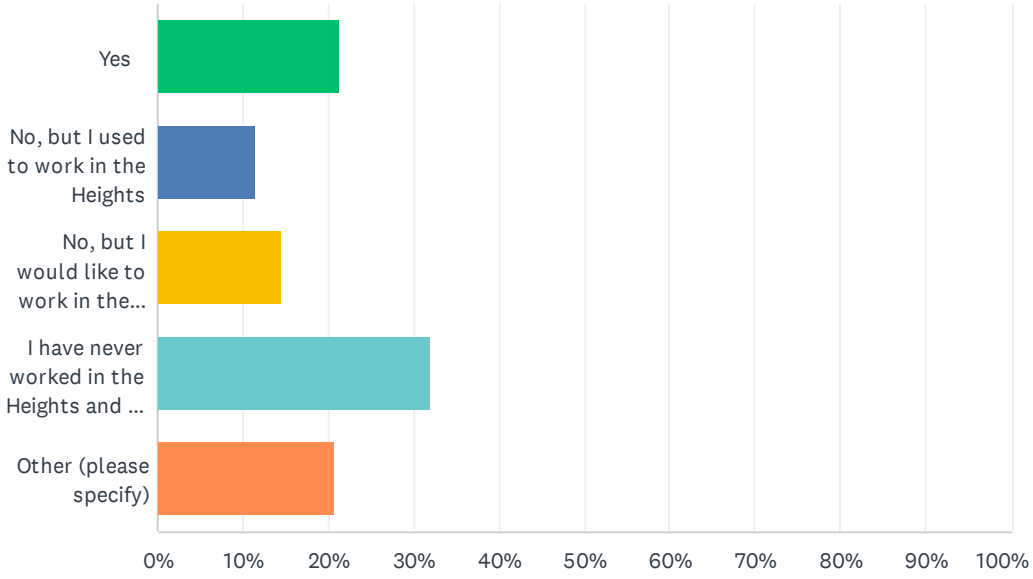
Answered: 132 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I do not live in the Heights	6.82%	9
Less than one year	0.76%	1
1 – 5 years	19.70%	26
6 – 10 years	10.61%	14
More than 10 years	62.12%	82
TOTAL		132

Q24 Do you work in the Heights?

Answered: 131 Skipped: 2



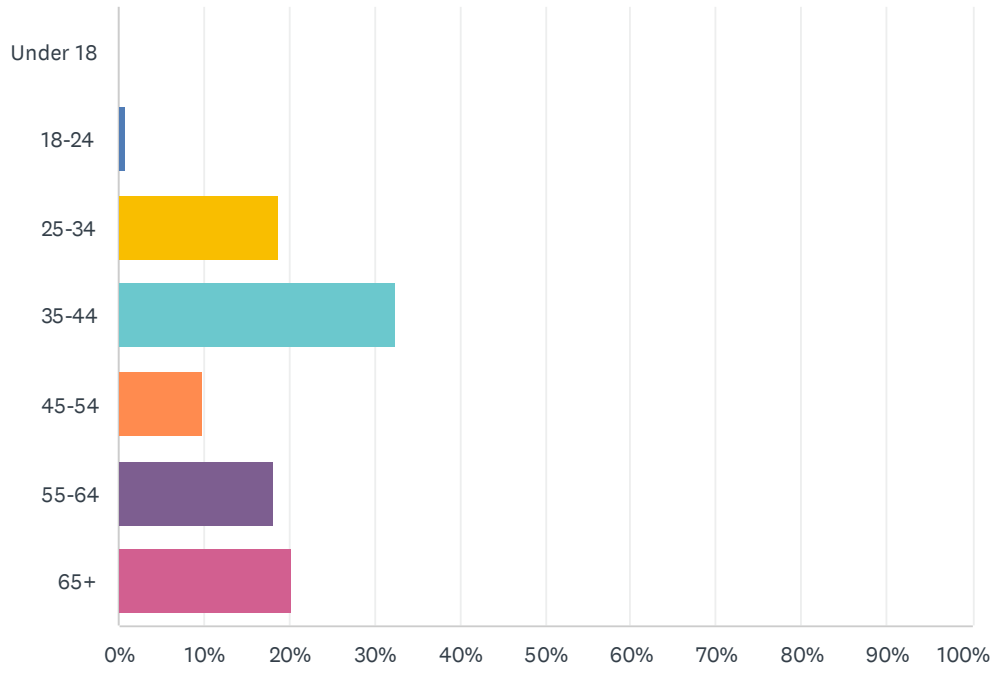
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	21.37%	28
No, but I used to work in the Heights	11.45%	15
No, but I would like to work in the Heights	14.50%	19
I have never worked in the Heights and am unlikely to	32.06%	42
Other (please specify)	20.61%	27
TOTAL		131

Q25 Why do you work in the Heights? Or, why not?

Answered: 118 Skipped: 15

Q26 What age group do you belong to?

Answered: 133 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-24	0.75%	1
25-34	18.80%	25
35-44	32.33%	43
45-54	9.77%	13
55-64	18.05%	24
65+	20.30%	27
TOTAL		133

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	1/28/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	7:00 pm
ORGANIZER:	Heights Task Force	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement
ATTENDEES:	Heights Task Force Members	ORGANIZATION:	Heights Task Force

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The DOWL team presented about the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update to the Task Force.

Discussion from the group included:

Plan recommendations

- Request identifying commercial and light commercial development nodes.
- Provide recommendations for utilities and growth locations.
- Consider chopping up heights into neighborhoods for unique identification.
- Plan should be explicit. Identify locations for specific development.

Transportation

- Transportation Network has improved since the last plan.
- Access to businesses along Main Street is a problem. Consider creative ways to access from behind (Lake Elmo or Bench).

Economic development

- Some goods don't exist in the Heights, so consumers must leave the heights to get clothing, shoes, athletic gear, lumber.
- When out of the Heights to get goods, they stop to eat, etc. thus not patronizing heights establishments.
- More grocery store options needed in the Heights.
- Need more business centers. Business centers will lead to more commercial development and housing.
- Keep people in Heights with business centers.
- Need unique destinations to attract residents and visitors; time to play offense.

Purpose

- Best plans are specific plans. Specific plans are controversial.
- Plan will be a tool for community leaders to aid in decision-making.

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	2/10/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	9:00 am
ORGANIZER:	DOWL	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Emily Tyler	Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
Scott Reiter	Director of Facilities, Billings Public Schools
Carolyn Sevier	Yellowstone River and Parks Association (YRPA)
Megan McLean	DOWL
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL

The DOWL team presented about the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update to representatives of agencies that oversee parks and public facilities in the Heights and collected feedback.

Discussion from the group included:

- Overview of Plan purpose/focus areas
- New developments/changes since the 2006 Plan was adopted
- Challenges and opportunities for future growth/development

Schools and Public Facilities:

- **Castlerock**
  - Challenges:
    - Traffic congestion on Governor's Blvd. between Castlerock Middle School and Skyview High School especially during pick-up/drop-off hours.
  - Current Plans/Projects since 2006:
    - Multi-use fields, paths, and a new parking lot were completed at Castlerock Park in the last five years.
  - Recommendations/Opportunities:
    - Add arrows to the traffic signals on Governors Blvd. to improve traffic flow.
    - School owns narrow strip of land west of Governors Blvd.; there are plans to use this for staff housing, parking, etc. DNRC owns the larger chunk of land west of this strip, which is full of prairie dogs, cacti, etc.
- **Beartooth Elementary, Bitterroot Elementary, and Medicine Crow Middle School**
  - Challenges:
    - Limited pedestrian connectivity between neighborhoods and the schools. Students walk/bike in the shoulder where there are sidewalk gaps.
    - Pedestrian/bicyclist connectivity issues between Bitterroot and Medicine Crow especially.
    - No sidewalk from Medicine Crow to Barrett Lane or from the trail off Khyl Lane to Wicks.
  - Current/Recent/Future Projects:

        - Developed green space with irrigation behind Beartooth Elementary for sports and recreation.
        - Upgraded two fields at Medicine Crow and added a football field, which get used a lot outside of school hours.
- **Independent School**
    - Challenges:
        - Pickup/drop-off and pedestrian safety issues due to the school being located along a highway with limited connectivity to surrounding parks and neighborhoods.
- **Skyview**
    - Challenges:
        - Parking and irrigation continue to be a challenge. Watering Skyview fields with city water costs about $20,000-$25,000 per month during the warmer months.
        - Sanbell consulted on the irrigation issue at one point and due to the absence of well water, their recommendations focused on alternate/drought-resistant landscaping.
    - Recommendations/Opportunities:
        - Look into astroturf, gravel mixture, or other drought-resistant options for landscaping to reduce watering costs.
        - Potential for spring water to be funneled to Skyview into an irrigation pond irrigation pond.
- **Career Center**
    - Challenges:
        - Not accessible for Skyview students due to distance.
    - Recommendations/Opportunities:
        - Skyway Drive (Inner Belt Loop) could help more students access the career center if buses can take Zimmerman Trail.

State Parks:

- **Lake Elmo**
    - Challenges:
        - Vandalism (i.e. graffiti/property damage in public restrooms, broken glass/trash in parking lots) and littering.
        - Pedestrian safety. Lake Elmo Drive residents organized an action to reduce the speed limit on Lake Elmo Drive from 35 to 25 mph in recent years, but it was unsuccessful.
        - There's currently no sidewalk along the east side of Lake Elmo, or a designated trail/bridge for people from the eastside neighborhoods to use to cross the irrigation canal and access the park. People often use the maintenance/authorized-use only trail west of the canal to walk, bike, etc. but the path is not officially designated for those purposes.
        - Lack of shade structure limits summer camp groups' length of visit.
        - Limited staff/volunteers to manage needed improvements to Lake Elmo.
    - Current Plans/Projects:
        - Emily Tyler, with FWP, is working with local mural artist to paint a mural at Lake Elmo.
        - Plans to update the Lake Elmo master plan which was last updated around 2005. Current plan includes parking lot expansion.
        - Plans are in process to expand the dog park around Lake Elmo.

        - Aspirational future projects:
            - Facility for paddle board/kayak rental concessionaire.
            - Small store for snacks, water, sunscreen, etc. to increase comfortability and motivate people to recreate longer.
            - Add shade structures.
    - Recommendations / Opportunities:
        - Improved signage (i.e. wayfinding signs, pedestrian crossing, etc.). FWP plans to standardize and overhaul wayfinding signs statewide in the future.
        - More lighting to deter criminal activity and parking lot parties after-hours.
        - Additional connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists especially from Lake Elmo Drive (south of Lake Elmo) to the west side of the lake.
        - Add a bus stop on Lake Elmo Drive.

- **Dover Park/YRPA:**
    - Challenges:
        - With the Yellowstone River bridge opening (via MDT's Billings Bypass project), Dover Park may see an increase in homeless encampments.
    - Current Plans/Projects:
        - YRPA is helping Pioneer School develop a small section of land east of the school into a multi-use field. Timeline depends on completion of gravel pit reclamation.
        - Within 4-5 years, Dover Park is expected to be more fully developed.
        - Master plan recently updated to include expanded footprint.
    - Recommendations/Opportunities:
        - Potential to provide activity/recreation space for Heights-based summer camp. There are only one or two summer camps offered through the City of Billings that are located/based in the Heights. Parks must have a public restroom and designated shelter to be approved for City of Billings summer camps and recreation.

Billings Parks & Recreation: (virtual meeting with Mike Pigg, director of Billings Parks on Wednesday, February 12)

- Mike is retiring in March 2025.
- Changes/improvements since 2006 Heights Plan:
    - A picnic structure was added to Castlerock Park. This is not a three-season structure as originally planned but if a community center is built in the future that could fulfill the need of a three-season shelter.
    - Signage plan for trails have been semi-implemented – it continues to evolve as the Heritage Trail system continues being developed.
    - Added playground, tennis courts, and parking area to Castlerock Park.
    - The Parks department has implemented strategies for using water more efficiently such as installing centralized control systems, recycling water, more efficient irrigation techniques, etc.
- Challenges/Voids:
    - Funding is a big challenge. Community surveys/outreach consistently show support for parks and community facilities but when voters are asked to support initiatives that would require them to pay for those facilities through taxes/levies/bonds/etc., they overwhelmingly vote against them. Billings residents don't typically vote for initiatives that exclusively benefit another area of town

without some sort of added value to their neighborhood, making it difficult to scale down those initiatives so they are more digestible.
    - Bond failed that would have helped build a community center for the Heights, so there's no current plan for a community center. Would like to continue plans for community center if a funding source can be secured.
    - Castlerock Park was developed using LWCF funds, so a community center would likely need to be developed on other land due to funding complexities (i.e. along Skyway Drive/Inner Belt Loop).
    - No pickleball courts in the heights – players can divide the tennis courts at Castlerock Park, but they must bring their own nets.
    - Dog parks are overcrowded.
    - When a bond was proposed in the early 2000s to replace Cobb Field with Dehler Park (which would result in the closure of Athletic Swimming Pool), it initially included a swimming pool in the Heights but the bond failed. When the pool was removed, the bond passed. While Oasis Water Park has been a big improvement, many Heights residents still support a community-owned swimming pool.
    - There's currently no protective structure at the Heights parks, preventing summer camps from originating in the Heights. There must be a shelter to protect kids from inclement weather while parents are working, etc. Schools aren't very accessible for this purpose during the summer due to deep cleaning and renovation projects that can't take place during the school year.
    - Private developers are required to give either 11% of the land they purchase or 11% of its value to the city upon acquisition but there is no plan requirement for future development and often no available funding which results in neighborhood park space becoming neglected.
    - Park maintenance and landscaping. Not many people support xeriscaping at community parks because they want to recreate / gather in areas with mowed and irrigated grass, etc.

- Recommendations/Opportunities:
    - Community center (with an aquatic feature such as a swimming pool), sports complex, and more park space along Skyway Drive. This may also attract people from other areas of town such as the west end.
    - Proactively acquire land in areas of predicted growth while property values are lower in anticipation of future park and neighborhood development.
    - Safety:
        - Biggest focus around pedestrian safety moving forward should be on lighting upgrades using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.
        - Currently seeking funding to add lighting to Castlerock Park. The next biggest need is to add lighting along "Safe Routes to School" routes and in parking lots and other areas where people are gathering when it's dark.
    - Wayfinding sign on trails more important.
    - Continue developing and adding trail connections through the Heritage Trail Plan.
    - Adding a community park (like Castlerock) to the east side of Main Street.
    - When the city inherits 11% of land acquired by developers, it should include long-term development and funding plans.
    - Public engagement:

        - When asking citizens if they support parks/community facility initiatives, ask if they would be willing to help fund them. If the answer is no, ask what information they would need to support those initiatives and explain the importance/benefit/value to the community.
        - Educate the community about SID/PMD (some city leaders are in favor of selling undeveloped parkland to developers if neighborhoods don't start
    - Add a city maintenance facility in heights so Parks staff could stay in the heights and originate work from there.
    - Find ways to bring people from other areas of town to the Heights in addition to focusing on ways to keep Heights residents in the Heights. Perhaps add more amenities to the Heights parks.

General Plan Recommendations:

- Improved coordination between the Heights and Lockwood (i.e. bring together city/county leaders in those areas to identify challenges and opportunities that impact both areas.
- Improved coordination between state parks and city parks departments (i.e. local FWP and City of Billings)
- Better signage on bike/pedestrian trails showing users how to connect to next segment/roadway/etc.
- Opportunity for increased connectivity between Lake Elmo and Dover Park (about 2 miles), or a marketing campaign (i.e. "Heights Greenway") to increase visibility for the two parks and their proximity to one another.
- Improved connectivity between Independent School and neighboring parks and neighborhoods. It is currently located on a highway which creates pedestrian safety and pick-up/drop-off issues.
- Additional bicycle/pedestrian connectivity from Kiwanis Trail to the new roadway running parallel to Mary Street (construction of this roadway is TBD due to Billings Bypass project).
- Include an action item in the Heights Plan for funding long-term park maintenance and development.
- Include an action item to coordinate with FWP as they update the Lake Elmo Master plan.
- Focus on improvements in the Heights that are equitable with downtown and the west end (i.e. improving dog parks, adding amenities, and building facilities/programs that build community pride and are of the same caliber/quality as west end improvements).
- Maintain smaller neighborhood parks in the Heights to provide residents/kids with green space and park amenities that are close to their homes, so they don't have to travel far to access the large parks.
- Include a public engagement initiative that focuses on activating the Heights community. This could include placemaking principles to explore ways to mobilize individual neighborhoods.
- The Billings Bypass presents an opportunity for an aesthetic Heights entryway. Once the bypass opens, the Heights might be first place people see when they enter Billings. Coordinate with YRPA on "Welcome to Billings" signage. Signage at entryway could also direct people to Lake Elmo and other Heights attractions.

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	2/14/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	11:00 AM – 12:00 PM
ORGANIZER:	DOWL	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Dianne Lehm	Big Sky EDA
Cathy Grider	Billings Chamber of Commerce
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL
Megan McLean	DOWL

The DOWL team presented about the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update to representatives from Big Sky Economic Development Association (Big Sky EDA) and Billings Chamber of Commerce and collected feedback from an economic and tourism perspective.

Discussion from the group included:

- Overview of Plan purpose/focus areas
  - Land Use/Development
  - Community/Public Facilities
  - Transportation/Connectivity
- New developments/changes since the 2006 Plan was adopted
- Challenges and opportunities for future growth/development

Chamber of Commerce:

- Recent / Past Efforts:
  - Chamber has current focus on hosting after-hours events at Heights businesses and hopes to establish a Heights business networking group.
  - Would like to increase Chamber membership to include more Heights businesses. Heights area businesses have the lowest Chamber membership of any other area of Billings but have expressed interest in Chamber services.
  - Chamber is predominantly member-funded.

- Challenges:
  - Ice hockey will be moving to the new sports complex at Amend Park soon, removing another incentive for people to spend money in the Heights.

- Recommendations / Opportunities:
  - Grow Heights membership with the Billing Chamber of Commerce.
  - Start a Heights business round table (perhaps quarterly at a place like Pizza Ranch) to bring new members into the fold, highlight the value of Chamber membership, and discuss challenges and opportunities for Heights businesses.
  - Find ways to collaborate with and revamp Heights Business Association, which isn't currently meeting.
  - Provide Heights specific networking opportunities.
  - Skyway Drive good be a good spot to develop a resort-style hotel (i.e. Sage Lodge, etc.).

Big Sky Economic Development:

- Challenges:
  - Barrett Road (county) is not maintained, weird pockets of county that aren't maintained.
  - Higher cost to develop within the Heights water district.
  - The Heights doesn't have a town center with walkable shopping etc.
  - Out of state businesses typically look at developing along I-90 corridor where infrastructure exists and is reliable.
  - TDS fiber installation is in progress in the Heights but taking longer than anticipated due to geotechnical issues (i.e. ground is more rock than soil, etc.).

- Recommendations / Opportunities:
  - There are opportunities to create attractions unique to the Heights (i.e. Peaks to Prairie; some sort of outdoor event and/or markets centered around certain neighborhoods such as the area from Lake Elmo to Dover Park to get people away from Main Street)
  - Lockwood Industrial Complex would be a good place to develop (i.e. good location for data centers or something similar that would add to the local tax base while also creating jobs – would like to see fewer storage units in this area as they don't create many jobs or contribute as much to the local economy)
  - Opportunity to create a commercial node with a neighborhood shopping area on the north side of the Yellowstone River bridge once bypass opens (i.e. restaurants, convenience store, coffee shop, etc.)
  - Development opportunities in the green space northwest of Highway 212.
  - "Dark fiber" – Fiber is installed along I-90 but it's not yet accessible. If the city/county can tap into fiber, it may change the development potential of those areas.
  - There are a lot of vacant commercial spaces in the Heights with no sale sign (i.e. Stadium Club) that have become a public safety issue. Still need to inventory those spaces and develop a marketing brochure for businesses looking for locations. Engagement with landowners about future plans is needed.
  - Having an anchor event in the Heights could bring people from other areas of town to the Heights (i.e. art fair/market around Lake Elmo or Castlerock Park, a weekday farmer's market, Peaks to Prairie, etc.).
  - Define the Heights neighborhood with gateway signage to give the community pride and ownership. (This could be an action item assigned to Heights Task Force and City/County Planning).
  - Building a base of volunteers and promoting community involvement could be beneficial for the Heights Task Force (more collaboration and inclusion).



BIG SKY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC IMPACT

ECONOMIC PULSE

BILLINGS HEIGHTS

33,494 REASONS TO INVEST IN A TREASURE FOR FAMILY, RECREATION, AND BUSINESS

Billings Heights is a family-oriented, suburban section of Montana's largest city that has major opportunities for increased business investment and amenities.

THE HEIGHTS BY THE NUMBERS

- **Total Population:** 33,494 (2024)
- **Population Density:** 349.39 people per square mile *(considered spacious living compared to traditional urban centers)*
- **Median Age:** 36.6 years
- **Gender Distribution**
  - **Male:** 51.9%
  - **Female:** 48.1%

Source: Economic Overview Report, JobsEQ, 2025

COMMUTE & TRANSPORTATION

- **Average Commute Time:** 19.9 minutes
- **Transportation Highlights:**
  - ***Skyway Drive (Inner Belt Loop)*** is a key 7-mile direct connector between the Heights and the West End. This connectivity can reduce trips to Billings West End or Downtown by as much as 10 minutes or more and allows another route to the area besides Montana's busiest roadways – 4th and 6th Ave. – and Main St.
  - ***Billings Logan International Airport*** is a short commute taking Billings Heights residents and business professionals to 10 direct flight destinations daily.
  - ***Billings Bypass Project –*** Six-phase road project connecting I-90 (Lockwood) to US-87 (Billings Heights). The Yellowstone River Bridge is complete, the Railroad Overpass to open by July 2025, full completion by 2028.

Source: Billings Bypass Project, Montana Department of Transportation, 2024

- **Public Transit Connectivity**
  - ***Billings Heights residents are served by three MET transit routes –*** Heights to Downtown, East Heights, and West Heights offering 450+ weekly trips to connect residents across our community. Although public transit connectivity is strong, only 0.4% of Heights residents utilize public transit.

Source: Fixed-Route Service Map, City of Billings MET Transit, 2024

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$74,572

State: $69,922
National: $80,610

MEDIAN HOME VALUE

$314,900

State: $495,100
National: $419,200

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

- **Total Housing Units:** 14,198
- With **36%** of households in Billings Heights having children, the area stands out as one of the most family-oriented corners of our city—offering a strong sense of community, excellent schools, and amenities designed for growing families.
- **Rental Vacancy Rate:** 3.2% *(demand for housing is greater than supply)*
- **Homeowner Vacancy Rate:** 0.2% *(demand for housing is greater than supply)*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2025

- **Owner-Occupied Housing:** **Billings Heights:** 76.6% **Yellowstone County:** 69.5% › **State:** 68.1%
- **Renter-Occupied Housing:** **Billings Heights:** 23.4% **Yellowstone County:** 30.5% › **State:** 31.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2025

HIGH END RESIDENTIAL ON THE HORIZON

- **The Timbers:** A sought-after Heights community blending contemporary homes, walkable parks, and top-rated schools—perfect for active families and professionals.
- **Bitterroot Heights:** A serene, well-established neighborhood offering spacious lots, mature landscaping, and a welcoming, close-knit feel.
- **Bar 11:** An exclusive enclave of custom-built homes perched with stunning Rim views, where luxury meets the quiet charm of the Heights.

Source: The Real Estate Collective, 2024

PUBLIC SAFETY TRENDS

CRIME RATES IN BILLINGS HEIGHTS CONSISTENTLY LOWER THAN BOTH STATE AND NATIONAL AVERAGES

Location	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Total Crime
Billings Heights	3.4	11.7	22.1
Montana (State Avg.)	4.9	18.3	23.2
United States (Avg.)	3.8	19.1	22.9

Source: Monthly Task Force Reports, Billings Police Department, 2025, Crime Maps and Statistics, CrimeGrade, 2025

- ***Billings Heights Crime Trends Compared to Other Billings Neighborhoods (Monthly)***
  - **Lower burglary rates** than South Side (12), Midtown (9), and West End (8).
  - **Fewer violent crimes** than in the South Side (15 assaults per month).
  - **Drug-related crime is lower** than South Side (10) and Midtown (6).
  - **Highest DUI rate in Billings** (12 per month, above all neighborhoods)

These trends reinforce Billings Heights' reputation as a secure, investment-ready district ideal for commercial growth and family-oriented amenities.

Continued on back

BUSINESS ADVISING & LENDING • COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT • NEW BUSINESS RECRUITMENT • WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

LIVE / WORK / PLAY

RECREATION, AMENITIES, AND ENTERTAINMENT

- *Lake Elmo State Park* (183 acres, year-round recreation)
- *Castle Rock Park* (scenic & ideal for outdoor activities)
- *Two Moons Park & Dover Park* (picnic & leisure spaces)
- *Dog Parks & Walking Trails* (pet-friendly community)
- *Oasis, Hawthorne Park & Castle Rock Park* (water park & wading/spray pool)
- *Lake Hills Golf Course*
- *High Sierra Park* (disc golf course, dog park, natural area, and athletic field)
- *Skyway Drive Trail* (a 5-mile trail running along the newly opened Skyway Drive)
- *Skyline Trail* (a 7-mile trail connecting Swords Park and Zimmerman Park)
- *First Interstate Bank Arena* (Yellowstone County venue providing entertainment, events, and state-wide hub for high school activities that offers plenty of opportunities for restaurants, hotels, and other amenities nearby for attendees from across the region).

Sources: Billings Trail Net, 2025., Billings Celebrates Opening of Inner Belt Loop/Skyway Drive Connecting Heights and West End, KTVQ News, 2024.

33,494 REASONS TO INVEST IN THE BILLINGS HEIGHTS:

The Billings Heights is the population equivalent of Kalispell (31,540) or Helena (32,529), respectively. Residents have historically been expected to commute to Billings Downtown or West End for services that could very well be saturated and supported by the existing population alone, in addition to creating destination-based experiences that would attract other neighborhoods to the Billings Heights.

Opportunities for new business investment and amenities in the Billings Heights:

- **Skyview High School and surrounding neighborhoods:**
  - **1,600 students,** a growing network of residential neighborhoods, and new connectivity via Skyway Drive make for a perfect location for food and drink kiosks, restaurants, and other amenities to serve students, staff, and residents alike.
- **Skyway Drive**
  - This **scenic thoroughfare** provides opportunities for new business investment to add vibrancy and destinations for vehicles and recreation enthusiasts traveling the 7-mile connector by car, bike, and foot.
- **Wicks, Bench, Hilltop and other neighborhood routes**
  - Experiences like neighborhood shops, boutique professional services, walk-in or kiosk-style food and drink and more would add vibrancy to these densely residential neighborhoods.
  - **New Business Highlight:** 105 Coffee and Brewing, founded by Heights-native Travis Zeilstra, offering events, a food-truck hub, and indoor/outdoor seating is now open at 815 Yellowstone River Road.
- **Main Street**
  - Connected to two of the busiest roadways in Montana – 4th and 6th Ave – Main Street continues to be a busy route at almost **39,000 trips a day.** Opportunities for larger retail, warehouse clubs, household recognizable brands, car dealerships, and locally owned fare would catch the eye of daily commuters.

Statistical Atlas of the United States, 2025

A "LAST BEST PLACE" FOR MONTANA'S FAMILIES

BILLINGS HEIGHTS: WALKABILITY & PARKLAND SNAPSHOT

Metric	Value	Interpretation
Homes within 0.5 miles of a K–12 school	3,392 homes	24.3% of all homes — just under 1 in 4
Homes within 0.5 miles of a park/ recreation area	4,524 homes	32.4% of all homes — slightly over 1 in 3
Total parkland and natural areas	293 acres	3.1% of Billings Heights' total land area

Source: Yellowstone County GIS Mapping Portal, 2025

COMMERCIAL SPACES READY FOR ACTIVATION

- **Total Office Space Inventory in Billings Heights:**

44,845 sq ft

Whether it's service-based businesses, community clinics, destination dining, or professional offices, this inventory provides a turnkey opportunity for entrepreneurs and investors.

Note: These figures are estimates based on publicly available listings and do not reflect current vacancies. They provide a general snapshot of commercial space in Billings Heights (59105).

Source: Montana Site Selector Market Profile Report, 2025., Multiple Listing Service (MLS), 2025., Commercial Real Estate Exchange Incorporated (CREXI), 2025.

INDUSTRY VOID ANALYSIS

- **Sectors with High Location Quotients (LQ) – Strong Industry Presence:**
  - **Transportation & Warehousing: LQ = 1.99**
  - **Real Estate & Leasing: LQ = 1.83**
  - **Accommodation & Food Services: LQ = 1.76**
- **Industries with Opportunity Gaps – Underrepresented Sectors Needing Growth:**
  - **Healthcare & Social Assistance: LQ = 0.54**
  - **Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services: LQ = 0.54**
  - **Information Technology:** LQ = **0.08** (highly underrepresented)

Source: National Multi-Family Housing Council 2025

LABOR FORCE & WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

- **Labor Force Participation Rate: 66.5%** - The percentage of all working-age individuals (16+) who are employed or actively seeking work. (Includes retirees, students, and those not in the workforce, which lowers the rate.)
- **Prime-Age Workforce (25-54 years): 88.1%** - Measures participation among individuals in their peak working years, where employment is more common. (This rate is higher than state (83.4%) and national average (82.1%)

Source: Montana Site Selector Market Profile Report, 2025

HIGHEST-EARNING INDUSTRIES

- **Mining, Quarrying, & Oil Extraction: $116,335** avg. annual wage *(highest-paying industry, though workforce size is lower)*
- **Management of Companies: $94,755** avg. annual wage *(high-skill, executive-level employment sector)*
- **Wholesale Trade: $86,620** avg. annual wage *(supports business-to-business sales, logistics, and distribution)*

Source: Montana Site Selector Market Profile Report, 2025

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MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	2/25/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	11:30 am
ORGANIZER:	DOWL	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Elyse Monat	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); BPAC
Anna O'Donnel	YMCA; BPAC
Jason Wood	BPAC
Dave Coppock	BPAC
Kristy Halderman	BPAC
Stephanie Donovan	A&E; BPAC
Megan McLean	DOWL
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL

The DOWL team attended the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee's (BPAC) monthly meeting on February 25 to share an update on the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update and collect feedback from a non-motorized transportation perspective.

Key Takeaways

- Challenges:
  - Perceived lack of support from Heights leadership for sidewalks.
  - Pedestrian connectivity and safety are often considered reactively, after the public is engaged in certain transportation or development projects. Would like to see more forethought as the Heights continues to grow.
  - Noted bicycle crashes on Lake Elmo Drive.
  - Discussed difficulty crossing Main Street.

- Updates since 2006:
  - Safe Routes to School was updated in 2022.
  - Heritage Trail Plain was superseded by the Billings Active Transportation Plan.
  - Facilities listed in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan must be incorporated into new subdivision development plans (only applies to developments in city limits).
  - Kiwanis Trail has been good for keeping kids off the roadway when traveling to/from school and home.
  - New cul-de-sacs within city limits must connect with a pedestrian facility per updated regulations.

- Opportunities/Recommendations:
  - More bike/ped connections away from busy corridors while still offering connectivity (i.e. perhaps more diversions connecting busy corridors to adjacent neighborhood paths or trails).

- The Heights has some unique views of Billings and the Yellowstone River. There is opportunity to promote/amplify that. (i.e. when coming down Bench toward Main Street, you see Two Moon Park/Yellowstone River and Four Dances Recreation Area on the left and the rimrocks straight ahead.) Would like to see those unique views protected with future growth/development.
- Would like to see gateway feature welcoming people to Billings in the north side of the Yellowstone River bridge once it opens.
- There seems to be increasing interest among Billings residents to bring back neighborhood businesses (i.e. Harper & Madison, Poly Food Basket, etc.).

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	5/1/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	10:00 am
ORGANIZER:	EMS/First Responders	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Jamie Fender	Billings Fire Department (BFD)
Eric Schnelbach	Billings Police Department (BPD)
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL
Megan McLean	DOWL

The DOWL team presented to representatives from the Billings Fire and Police Departments about the Heights Neighborhood Plan Update and asked for input from the law enforcement/first responder perspective.

Improvements since 2006:

- New fire station on Lake Elmo/Hilltop

Current/Existing Culture:

- More calls on Main Street and Lake Elmo due to commercial businesses (i.e. theft) and multi-unit housing issues (i.e. apartments or trailers on Lake Elmo)
- Calls predominantly include crashes on Main Street and medical
- If a 911 call is for violent offense or injuries, BFD, AMR, and BPD all go. BFD stages until BPD clears scene.

Challenges:

- Traffic congestion around the Metra. Trucks aren't currently running out of the new station so if backup is required, trucks have to come from Station 1 (8th Ave N) which results in long response time.
- Water supply
    - Dry fire hydrants in the Heights – one on Three Bars Trail. In order to develop subdivision, developer had to install a dry hydrant hookup.
- Transient population growing in the Heights particularly around Main St.
- No designated fire lanes in Billings (Albertson's in the Heights added one to parking lot).
- Congestion at Metra is a challenge. Have two patrol cars in the Heights. Would like to have a satellite office (sub-station) in the Heights for the convenience of officers.
- If streets are too narrow (20-26 feet) and sidewalks protrude (bulbouts), it can cause access issues for fire trucks and traffic as they usually have to close the street. BFD prefers 34-foot-wide streets with designated fire lane. Understand the need to balance pedestrian comfort/safety with access for first responders.
- Development planned for Alkali creek south of intersection with Skyway Drive. Recent flash flooding prevented access into subdivision – important to have two access points.
- BUFSA (Billings Urban Fire Safety Area), provide support for BFD but need access to water. Outside city limits, need a water supply to develop.

- Failed safety levvy (2024) would have allocated two new School Resource Officers (SROs) at two Heights middle schools.

Miscellaneous:

- Main Street has a perception of “blight.” In order to attract people to the Heights, it will need a big beautification effort.
- Development planned between Rehberg Ranch and Skyway Drive
- New developments must add 10% to estimated water usage calculations to accommodate for fire safety and potential issues.

Recommendations:

- Would like to see Stations 10 and 11 on west and east side of Heights. The next fire station will be likely be on the west end, off Hesper. Stations 10 and 11 would be long-term plans ~15 years in the future.
- Sub-station (where BPD can dispatch out of an existing BFD station) would be useful in the Heights so that Heights patrol has a “landing zone” without having to go home or to downtown headquarters.

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	6/5/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	11:00 AM – 12:15 PM
ORGANIZER:	DOWL	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL
Megan McLean	DOWL
Sydney Pfeaster	DOWL
Lora Mattox	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
Kassi Strong	Strong Marketing & Strategy
Cody Strong	Strong Marketing & Strategy
Ming Cabrera	Ming Properties
Jeff Essman	Ess-Tech LLC
Kari Jones	Kari Jones – State Farm
Shelli Mann	Boothill Inn
Dennis Benson	Warden's Casino
Josh Benson	Warden's Casino
Brandon Fleury	105 Brewing
Jennifer Owens	Billings City Council

The DOWL team updated a group of Heights business owners about the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan and collected feedback from the business owner / Heights resident perspective.

Challenges:

- Fiber optic infrastructure continues to be a challenge — TDS is running into geotechnical issues causing delays in fiber installation.
- Water rates and water access have dissuaded businesses from moving into the Heights.
- Centennial Ice Arena is often at capacity or booked. It can be difficult to take kids skating. Note: Signal Peak is slated to put resources into Centennial for upkeep once the new ice arena in South Billings is complete.
- Federal economic climate has caused reluctance from large "anchor" retailers to establish business in existing buildings along Main Street, though it's likely they will come back to the table as the economic climate settles.
- The Heights was established as a county subdivision – after annexation into the city, some of the infrastructure common in the county (i.e. gravel roads, lack of stormwater infrastructure, etc.) was never updated to city standards.
- City/county regulations regarding business permitting present challenges and can dissuade small businesses from moving forward due to unexpected expenses (i.e. when

going through the permitting process, one restauranteur's permit triggered a requirement to retrofit fire sprinklers with fire lights which were going to be too expensive.)
- Zoning in the Heights continues to be a challenge for businesses particularly between Wicks and Pemberton.
    - One attendee described the zoning as being "too parcelized."
- Families and "weekend warriors" often spend their weekends in areas of Billings where they can accomplish multiple objectives (i.e. errands, shopping, entertainment, eating, recreation, etc.) so residents often leave the Heights and spend a whole day on the west end.
- Businesses who thrive on weekend traffic struggle to survive during the week.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Would like to see more unique opportunities that motivate people — from all areas of Billings — to spend time in the Heights on weekends and weekdays (i.e. Oasis Water Park, etc.).
- There's an opportunity to establish a TIF district along Main Street starting at Wicks and extending northeast toward Dover Park, past the Bitterroot housing development.
    - Discussions have been ongoing for several years.
    - Now is the time to mobilize residents and businesses to gain support for and take action toward establishing a TIF district, before property values increase because of the Billings Bypass and corresponding development in the northeast Heights.
- There's also opportunity to establish a Heights business improvement district (BID).
- Potentially create a social media landing page for the Heights to create more visibility for what the Heights has to offer and build community.
    - Kassi owns the @billingsheights Instagram handle.
- There is a need for networking and other opportunities for Heights businesses to cultivate connectivity, partnership, and togetherness.
    - Heights Business Association has been dormant due to COVID but has funds available. There is opportunity to educate the community about the Heights Business Association and pass the baton to new leadership.
    - There are other networking groups in Billings — perhaps there's an opportunity to loop Heights businesses into existing networks (i.e. Biz to Biz, Trailhead to Trailhead, etc.).
    - The Billings Chamber of Commerce is building a Heights networking group, but membership of the Chamber would be a requirement for participation.
- Would like to see smaller scale commercial nodes off Main Street so people can support businesses while staying close to their homes/neighborhoods.

General Comments:

- The Heights Neighborhood Plan boundary should include the airport and Rehberg Ranch since school-aged children in that subdivision go to school in the Heights. The Heights is a "poster child for urban renewal" (i.e. inadequate right of ways, unpaved streets, missing storm drains).
- Roxy Lane struggles with stormwater drainage issues. Would like to see the city pave and update the road and add curb and gutter for improved drainage.

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	10/21/2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	2:00 PM
ORGANIZER:	DOWL	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL
Megan McLean	DOWL
Tate Johnson	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
Jeff Essmann	Chair, County Water District of the Billings Heights

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The DOWL and project team met with Jeff Essmann, current chair of the County Water District of the Billings Heights about the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan to collect feedback from the District's perspective.

Challenges:

- Access to water has largely been resolved
- Issues within district to get proper looping of system led to stagnant water situations or operational problems (i.e. if there's a break and it's at the end of a line, a lot of users couldn't access water)
- Some water lines are too small in diameter (need to upgrade from 6" to 8" for better flow/pressure)
- Low pressure problem in Lake Hills subdivision
- Water District has been a barrier to economic development in the Heights
- Very expensive to run transmission lines

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Study is ongoing to understand what consolidation with city would look like (district board open to consolidation to save customers money, etc.)
    - The board may consider putting consolidation out for district customers to vote on
- Study is supposed to be finalized in January—if this timeline can align with the Heights Plan update, that would be ideal. The district will be in a better position to make recommendations at that point.
- Seeing 1% growth in water meters annually
- Billings Bypass will be completed in the coming years—the development on the north end of the Heights should allow for denser development and will need water/sewer access.
- Dense development with municipal water and sewer in vicinity of Bypass would foster better more dense development and could serve as a catalyst project for an Urban Renewal District to provide upgrades to deficient water, sewer, stormwater, and street infrastructure in the older portions of the Heights

General Comments:

- Would like to see if the Heights become Urban Renewal District to help improve gaps in infrastructure

MEETING SUMMARY

PROJECT:	Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update	DATE:	2/6/2026
PROJECT NUMBER:	4071.22009.01	TIME:	10:00 am
ORGANIZER:	DOWL	SUBJECT:	Stakeholder Engagement

ATTENDEES:	ORGANIZATION:
Megan McLean	DOWL
Lisa Olmsted	DOWL
Sarah Plath	Billings Public Works
Lora Mattox	Billings-Yellowstone County MPO

Progress since 2006 Plan:

- Safe Routes to School has made some progress ("chipping away")
- Annual "missing sidewalks" program - typically focus on locations where there's also an opportunity to fulfill a Safe Routes to School project
- Street lighting:
  - Now required per city code that new residential developments must have street lighting
  - No code/requirement for added street lighting in infill developments
- Billings Public Works (BPW) looks at annual programs and identifies biggest needs across the City. Heights projects currently on the radar include pavement preservation/storm drain projects.
- There have been studies looking at drainage in the Heights. They're mostly focused on the west Heights, around Skyview.
- TDS and Ziply are both working to expand service into the Heights, but not all areas are currently served.
- Billings does not currently have any signal related projects planned for the heights, but have annual funding in the CIP that is prioritized based on need for signal improvements and signal timing coordination.

Challenges:

- Route connectivity
- Congestion
- Heights water discussion is evolving, no concrete direction at this point. A consultant is looking at whether it makes sense to merge with City.
- Survey respondents who said the Heights does not have adequate sewer services are likely those who live in county pockets as there aren't notable issues with city sewer services.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Refer to projects in Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) – Wicks project planned for FY 27-28
- There is a list of potential future projects not in the City's 5-year plan at the back of CIP. There are several Heights projects in that list.

- “Data Dashboard” is a helpful resource and shows all LRTP projects (Billings MPO LRTP Projects Dashboard)
- Non-motorized Transportation – update language from “Heritage Trail Plan” to 2016 Bike/Ped Master Plan. Potential to garner support for the updated Bike/Ped Master Plan (which didn’t get adopted in 2025 due to City/County pushback) since there’s been turnover on City Council.
- Planning for Skyway Drive water/sewer, doesn’t show up in CIP but included in the “future project list” at the back.
- Take advantage of Traffic Calming Program/mechanisms (more cost-efficient in neighborhood streets, rather than “collector streets”).
- Travel Corridor Coordination (traffic signal timing improvements fall under this program).

APPENDIX 2: PRELIMINARY GROWTH SCENARIOS MEMO

DOWL

MEMORANDUM

TO: City of Billings

FROM: DOWL

DATE: December 26, 2025

SUBJECT: Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update
Preliminary Growth Scenarios Memorandum

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an overview of future growth scenarios identified as part of the Heights Neighborhood Plan Update process. Based on feedback received from public outreach to date, and analysis of the population, demographic, and housing characteristics and trends within the Heights, three preliminary growth scenarios were identified:

- Scenario A: Neighborhood Expansion
- Scenario B: Neighborhood Nodes
- Scenario C: Neighborhood Infill

Following City feedback on these scenarios, the preferred scenario (or a combination of elements from multiple scenarios) will be refined into a Future Land Use Map that guides future growth and land use in the Heights. A summary analysis of these three scenarios is provided in this memorandum.

Overview

In 2023, the State of Montana passed new land use legislation including the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA, also known as Senate Bill 382 or SB 382), which provides standardized land use planning requirements for larger cities in Montana. A key priority of this bill is to address Montana's urgent housing needs.

In 2025, the City began their update of the Growth Policy to comply with MLUPA. Per Sections 9 and 10, the citywide land use plan must consider existing conditions, population projections, estimated future housing needs, the development capacity of available land, constraints impacting housing development, and actions the City can take to facilitate development of adequate housing units to accommodate projected population growth. Based on this analysis, Section 14 requires a citywide Future Land Use Map to show the city's preferred pattern and intensity of development. Per Section 15, neighborhood plans may be used to provide more localized analysis, which may be especially useful in especially fast-growing areas like the Heights.

To help inform the citywide planning process, the City has initiated multiple neighborhood plan updates, including an update to the Billings Heights plan from 2006. This Neighborhood Plan update takes a comprehensive look at the Heights' existing conditions, evolving trends, and future community needs. This is used to inform actions that the City of Billings might take to help move towards community vision and goals specific to the Heights.

Future land use scenarios weave together ideas across land use, transportation, economic development, public facilities and services, and more. Most importantly, they guide development patterns across the area in the future. For example, one scenario could focus on managing growth as it expands outward. Another scenario could focus around increasing residential density in existing areas near transit, employment, and amenities. There are multiple ways the City could

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encourage development that will serve the needs of the future population, and the preferred land use scenario will guide future zoning and development.

Examining multiple future land use scenarios is helpful because it allows the City and Billings residents to select a growth pattern that is reflective of the community's growth vision and values. The Heights community provided input on their priorities and how they would like to see the neighborhood evolve in the future. Three future land use scenarios were developed out of this input, offering a menu of different approaches from which a preferred scenario can be selected and formalized as the Future Land Use Map. This memo provides a brief description for each of the scenarios.

Future Land Use Designations

Within each growth scenario, future land use designations are used to represent the desired character of different areas in the neighborhood. These designations include residential, mixed-use, and commercial environments that may have a different look and feel. Rather than zoning districts, which dictate applicable code requirements for each parcel of land, the future land use designations are intended to be guidelines that shape future development at a high level. They include some flexibility of the zoning districts and types of development that may be compatible with the designations. Designations are summarized below in Table 1. The citywide future land use designations also include Downtown Urban, which was excluded from this table as it is only applicable to Downtown Billings.

To give a sense of existing development in the Heights and its alignment with the Future Land Use categories described in Table 1, a figure was prepared showing existing land uses and zoning, categorized by the land use categories. Figure 1 is intended to represent Existing Land Use to act as a baseline for the Growth Scenarios in this memo and ultimately the development of the Future Land Use Map.

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Table 1: Future Land Use Designations

Land Use Category	Rural Residential & Agriculture (RRA)	County Neighborhoods (CN)	Urban Residential Limited (URL)
Character	Agricultural production lands and rural residential uses on lots larger than one acre that include agricultural uses and may conserve the agricultural heritage of the Yellowstone Valley. Due to the low-density nature of development, public water and wastewater utilities are generally not available.	Large lot rural neighborhoods typically not developed in the city with limited access to public water and wastewater utilities.	Suburban residential with structures of similar setback and maximum heights, most will have access to public water and sewer.
Implementing Zones	A, RR1, RR3	N4, RR1, RMH	N4, N3, N2, N1
Primary Land Uses	Agriculture, rural residential	Suburban residential	Suburban residential
Building Types	Single family dwellings, manufactured homes, accessory dwelling units	Single family dwellings, manufactured homes, accessory dwelling units	Single family dwellings, duplexes, accessory dwelling units
Density (Gross Development Acreage)	Max 1/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	1 - 3.5 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	3.5 - 7 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)
Mobility & Street Network	The street grid is more spread out, typically following section lines with private vehicles as the primary mode of transportation. Local streets are generally gravel.	Neighborhood streets connected to collectors or arterials, some of which may be paved. Future county neighborhoods should be connected to existing neighborhoods.	Paved neighborhood streets connected to collectors or arterials. Future neighborhoods should be connected to existing neighborhoods. These neighborhoods may have access to nearby community amenities including parks, schools, and neighborhood commercial areas.

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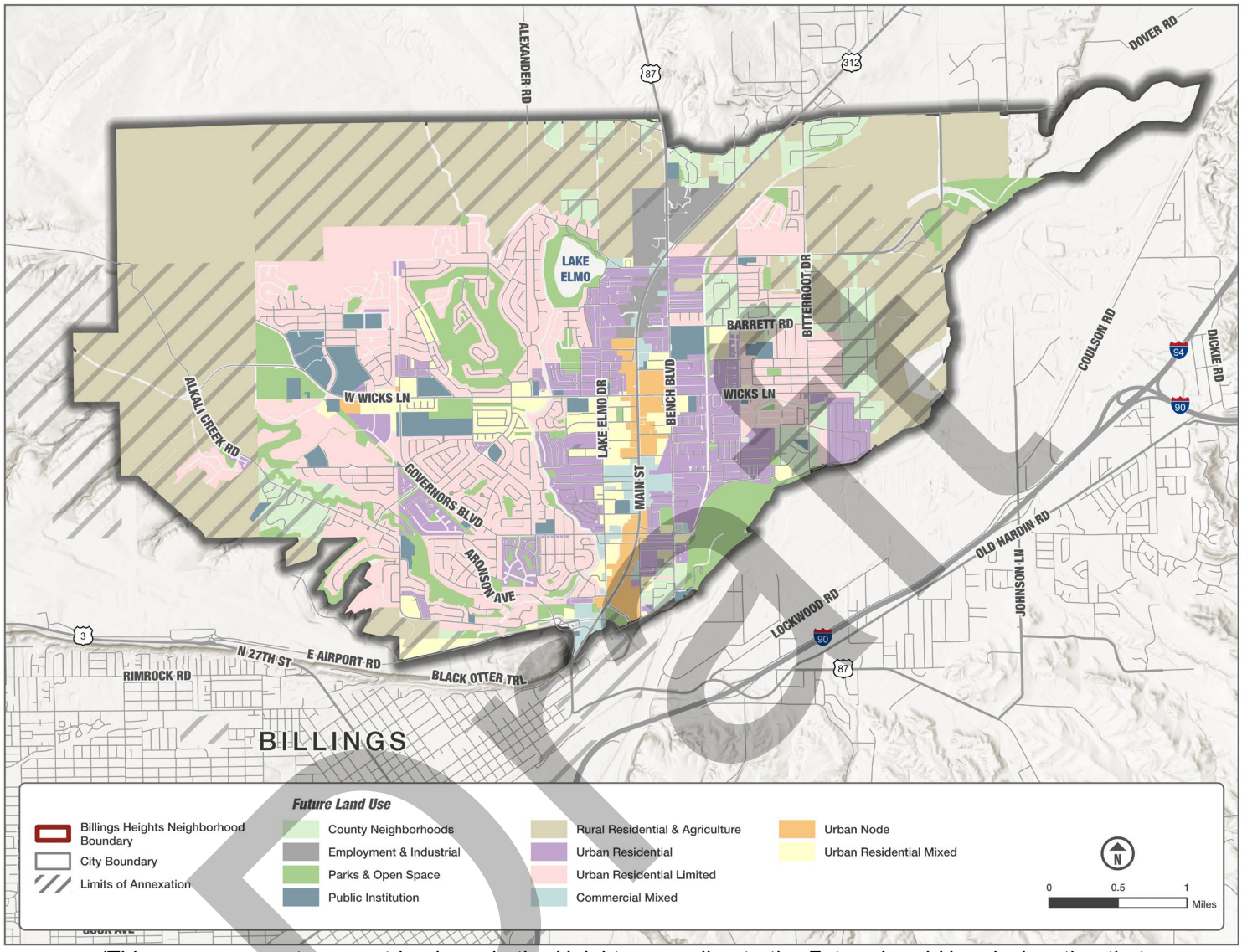
Land Use Category	Urban Residential (UR)	Urban Residential Mixed (URM)	Urban Node (UN)
Character	Mixed density neighborhoods including some neighborhood commercial and housing choices from single family to townhome (4 units/structure). Public water and sewer is provided.	Higher density adjacent to mixed use with corridor services such as smaller retail businesses. Highly walkable neighborhood with possible service from transit. Typically found adjacent to Urban Nodes. Development should focus on active uses and providing a safe and comfortable environment for people, both residents and visitors.	Higher-intensity, larger-scale places where destinations like shopping and services are walkable but primarily accessed by vehicles.
Implementing Zones	N3, N2, N1, RMH, NX1, NO, NMU	N1, RMH, NX1, NX2, NO, NMU, CMU1	NX2, NX3, NMU, CMU1, CMU2
Primary Land Uses	Residential, neighborhood services, and small offices	Residential, commercial, Office, Public Spaces	High-density residential, commercial, mixed-use, shopping centers, public spaces, office
Building Types	Single family to four family dwellings, accessory dwelling units, neighborhood services	Single family to eight family dwellings, accessory dwelling units, commercial mixed use, offices, retail	Apartments, townhomes, multi-tenant retail, offices, commercial with or without drive thru services
Density (Gross Development Acreage)	6 - 16 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	12 - 24 units/ac (accessory dwelling units are not primary units)	16+ units/ac
Mobility & Street Network	Development is organized to support a walkable environment. Streets have adjacent sidewalks and shared use pathways to connect neighborhoods to community amenities and nearby commercial areas.	Development is organized to support a walkable environment. Streets have adjacent sidewalks and shared use pathways to connect community amenities and commercial areas with walkable blocks.	Arterials, collectors, local commercial streets supported by transit that are adjacent to sidewalks and shared use pathways.

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Land Use Category	Commercial Mixed (CM)	Employment & Industrial (EI)	Open Space (OS)	Public Institution (PI)
Character	Standalone commercial areas either in the city or county sometimes with adjacent higher-density residential. Could include areas in the county for contractor shops, storage, warehousing, sometimes adjacent to urban nodes, sometimes adjacent to urban residential mixed.	Areas of employment that provide a range of jobs in sectors such as production, manufacturing, research, distribution or extraction which may be incompatible with residential uses.	Regional public parks, recreation areas, and natural or sensitive areas which provide a variety of recreational opportunities.	Public, civic, and institutional uses located within or on the edge of neighborhoods.
Implementing Zones	NX2, NX3, CMU2, CX, C3	CX, C3, I1, I2, EBU	P	PD, P2, P3
Primary Land Uses	Higher intensity commercial uses, may include high-density residential	Warehousing, hotels, larger-scale buildings providing employment	Regional and neighborhood recreational facilities as well as passive and active open spaces	Schools, churches, hospitals, public facilities (non-recreation)
Building Types	Apartments, multi-tenant retail, offices, commercial with or without drive thru services, warehouse	Multi-story or multiple structures to accommodate employment	Facilities associated with public use and recreation	A variety of building types varying in nature of use and sizing
Density (Gross Development Acreage)	16+ units/ac	Residential units are unlikely in these areas, but are allowed in Heavy Commercial zones	N/A	Density associated with institutional use
Mobility & Street Network	Arterials, collectors, and local commercial streets	Sites are well connected to the arterial and collector street network and provide connections to interstate transportation networks (air, train, highway, etc.).	Parks and recreation sites will be well connected to adjacent neighborhoods.	Typically located on collectors or arterials. Occasionally located within neighborhoods.

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Table 1: Billings Heights Baseline Land Use Map



(This map represents current land use in the Heights according to the Future Land Use designation that best matches current patterns. This will serve as a baseline when creating the Future Land Use Map.)

Growth Scenarios

Based on the population projection, the Heights population is projected to grow by over 10,000 people by 2045. Housing analysis completed as part of this plan update process estimates that 6,482 additional housing units beyond existing housing in the Heights would be needed to serve the growing population. Much of the Heights has followed relatively low-density suburban development patterns; if a trend of developing at minimum or near-minimum residential density continues, the Heights could face a shortage of over 4,000 units. If development capacity is maximized across all available land, there is potential to produce over 15,000 units, but this would not be considered realistic due to market constraints.

Based on current population trends, households tend to be smaller, and there appears to be a need for more compact homes and a greater variety of housing options including “middle housing”

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types such as duplexes, triplexes, townhomes and similar options that fall between apartments and the large single-family homes that make up a significant portion of the Heights' land area. Beyond housing, adequate transportation networks, utility infrastructure, and other public facilities and services are needed for a well-functioning neighborhood. Many Heights residents that have submitted survey responses or comments emphasized their desire for greater economic activities and community spaces that contribute to neighborhood quality of life.

It is difficult to predict how Billings and its population may continue to evolve in the future. Future land use scenario planning can be a tool for anticipating what steps are needed to help the Heights and the City work towards the Heights neighborhood vision:

> ***"The Heights is proud to be a vibrant, family-friendly neighborhood with a small-town feel.***
>
> ***The community aims to enhance quality of life with balanced residential development, safe and connected transportation systems, ample parks and community amenities, diverse economic development, and the infrastructure needed to support the neighborhood as it grows."***

There are multiple ways this vision could be implemented. The following Scenarios A, B, and C were developed to evaluate what it could look like.

Scenario A: Neighborhood Expansion

This scenario addresses the City's growth needs by emphasizing new residential development expanding out from the outer edges of the neighborhood, within the Limits of Annexation. The expansion would include some continuation of lower density subdivisions through the Urban Residential Limited (URL) land use designation (density of 3.5 – 7 dwelling units per acre), but it would also prioritize more compact residential neighborhood development following the Urban Residential (UR) patterns ranging up to greater density of 16 units per acre.

For decades, the growing Heights population has been expanding via new residential subdivisions developed on the outskirts of the neighborhood. There are opportunities for additional residential expansion into agricultural land within the Limits of Annexation, especially to the north and west, and this scenario would continue the pattern with an eye towards more compact new neighborhoods that serve neighborhood needs for smaller homes and attached middle housing options.

Summary of anticipated future land use changes:

- *Designate rural residential and agricultural areas as a mix of Urban Residential – Limited (URL) and Urban Residential (UR).* Much of the land within the Limits of Annexation is most similar to the Rural Residential & Agriculture (RRA) future land use designation. This designation is described as follows: "Agricultural production lands and rural residential uses on lots larger than one acre that include agricultural uses and may conserve the agricultural heritage of the Yellowstone Valley. Due to the low-density nature of development, public water and wastewater utilities are generally not available." Designating some of these areas as URL or UR would enable future rezoning and development. Growth into these areas would need to be managed cautiously, so that the closest-in areas are developed first, only as the new additional residential area is needed.

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Developing extensive infrastructure to serve only a small number of additional residential units would make new development more costly and have larger impacts on agricultural and open space land than necessary to accommodate population growth. Therefore, the more compact UR designation should be prioritized along with some expansion of URL areas.

- *Encourage more housing within existing county neighborhoods.* Some County land within the Limits of Annexation is currently developed as low density residential that is most similar to the County Neighborhoods (CN) land use designation, which is described as "Large lot rural neighborhoods typically not developed in the city with limited access to public water and wastewater utilities." If this land is annexed, it will be at a much lower density than many surrounding neighborhoods, making it more costly to serve with adequate transportation, utility, and other infrastructure. These areas could be designated as URL or UR; over time, this could encourage and facilitate subdividing large tracts into smaller parcels and more compact neighborhoods. The City could also explore strategies for encouraging accessory dwelling units, cottage clusters, and similar types of housing on existing larger lots. As identified in the housing analysis completed as part of this plan update, large single-family homes may not meet the needs of anticipated neighborhood demographics in the future, so smaller homes in general should also be prioritized. Smaller home sizes may also help balance costs given the potential high cost of bringing new infrastructure to these areas.

- *Support neighborhood commercial locations and small multifamily and/or mixed-use development at major intersections in the expansion areas through the Urban Residential Mixed (URM) designation.* More housing farther out may support small neighborhood commercial locations at a few major intersections outside of existing commercial centers in the Heights. If uses like small groceries, convenience stores, or restaurants and coffee shops could be supported, these could create space for more community interaction and cut down on the need to always drive to the Main Street commercial strip. The precise location of these uses is difficult to predict without knowing what land on the rural periphery would be the first to develop, so it is important to note that if designated now, they may shift in the future. Small multifamily and/or mixed-use development would also be suitable at these neighborhood centers, as these locations would provide a small pocket of walkability in otherwise lower density expansion areas.

Initial Evaluation of Scenario A:

This scenario would have minimal impact on existing neighborhood form and function and would carry on the low-density suburban development patterns that dominate the Heights today. Outward expansion of low-density residential subdivisions would require significantly more transportation and utility infrastructure, as well as more public facilities and services to serve these remote corners of the community. Because of larger unit sizes and higher costs associated with this type of residential development, this scenario may perpetuate a mismatch between Heights housing stock and the needs of the future population based on current trends – smaller, lower cost units in a variety of configurations to serve a variety of household types.

In this scenario, the Heights would likely remain a "bedroom community" with mostly residential land uses and minimal areas of auto-oriented commercial. While a peaceful neighborhood setting is valued in the Heights, many people in the neighborhood would like greater walkability. The City may need to find ways to facilitate and encourage commercial development and a more compact neighborhood expansion pattern, otherwise the commercial development that acts as

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neighborhood amenities and social spaces may continue to not be economically viable outside of Main Street in the Heights.

Scenario B: Neighborhood Nodes

This scenario addresses the City's growth needs by emphasizing new mixed-use development organized around specific development nodes / activity centers identified in the Heights. The primary focus would be to create pockets of higher intensity development to serve both housing and economic development goals. Urban Residential Mixed (URM) and Urban Node (UN) would be key land use designations in this scenario, with a minimum residential density of 16 housing units per acre in redesignated areas around nodes, ranging up to 40 units per acre closest to the new activity centers.

There is community support for more residential development concentrated in areas where it makes sense, as long as adequate transportation, utilities, and other public facilities and services are accommodated. New mixed-use or commercial nodes, as well as smaller-scale commercial at key intersections scattered around the neighborhood, can make the surrounding residential areas more walkable and vibrant, while also reducing traffic pressure on Main Street.

The vast majority of survey respondents – approximately 85% – said that walkability is one of the most important neighborhood characteristics for them. This suggests a desire for neighborhood commercial or institutional uses and nearby access to recreation and open space.

Summary of anticipated future land use changes:

- *Establish strong commercial and mixed-use nodes outside of the primary Main Street corridor.* Potential areas that could be a good fit for concentrations of new mixed-use development include (1) along Skyway Drive / Wicks Lane at the west end of the neighborhood (including the State Trust land that has been identified for future mixed-use development), and (2) along the Billings Bypass where it enters the neighborhood from the northeast. With enhanced access thanks to recent roadway projects, these areas can be future "nodes" of activity for the neighborhood beyond the existing Main Street corridor. With their location at each new entrance to the Heights, they also offer strong opportunities for neighborhood gateways and placemaking, and this can also help emphasize and enhance access to major neighborhood open spaces like Dover Park. The UN designation is appropriate for these locations as it allows a wide range of higher density housing and activity center-oriented uses.

- *Identify other intersections that may be appropriate for smaller-scale pockets of neighborhood commercial.* Many Heights residents indicated a desire for improved walkability in their neighborhood. As the neighborhood has expanded outward over time, many residential areas are farther away from walkable destinations. Based on current development patterns, additional locations can be identified at significant intersections where non-residential uses may be appropriate, viable, and beneficial to the surrounding residential areas. Designating the land as URM could support the right mix of uses and scale for fitting into established neighborhoods. Strategic economic development practices from the City and community groups may be helpful to encouraging the desired neighborhood commercial development, given that it would be a deviation from typical existing development patterns.

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- *Encourage additional housing density adjacent to new nodes and other neighborhood commercial areas.* The majority of higher density multi-family housing in the Heights is located on either side of the Main Street central corridor, along Lake Elmo Drive or Bench Boulevard. Additional density and variety of housing types is needed in the future to support the evolving demographics and household preferences. Locating additional UR and URM areas to encourage new housing development can help support the economic viability of new activity centers, and the proximity to walkable destinations can also serve as an amenity for residents of new housing developments.

Initial Evaluation of Scenario B:

This scenario may have the potential to create the most visible changes in the Heights, as it would create a set of new higher-intensity mixed-use nodes along with neighborhood commercial and mixed-use spread across major intersections throughout the neighborhood. The City could catalyze adequate housing to meet future needs in the Heights through a smaller set of impactful projects in strategic locations, rather than relying on slower processes of outward expansion or gradual infill development. This scenario would balance commercial and higher density residential opportunities in different concentrated locations across the neighborhood, paving the way for greater walkability immediately adjacent to nodes and neighborhood commercial locations, but also across the neighborhood as a whole.

Some community members expressed concern about protecting the existing character of their primarily residential neighborhood. Balancing higher intensity nodes that can bring new life to the neighborhood with appropriate density transitions can help address these concerns, allowing for a continued mix of higher and lower intensity parts of the Heights neighborhood. Especially given the already significant changes occurring with new transportation access from the west and east, there may be opportunities to establish nodes that guide growth in new centers, rather than significantly altering established areas.

Scenario C: Neighborhood Infill

This scenario addresses the City's growth needs by emphasizing greater residential density within existing developed areas of the Heights. It is envisioned that new housing would be spread relatively evenly throughout the neighborhood rather than just expanding outward or just around specific nodes. Across many areas of the Heights, the baseline land uses could be upgraded to the next level of intensity. For example, many URL areas could be designated as UR, which may encourage more compact infill and redevelopment that still fits within the character of the existing neighborhood – just allowing closer to 6 to 16 units per acre rather than 3.5 to 7 units per acre associated with URL.

Many existing residential areas in the Heights are low density. This has resulted in greater distances between homes and neighborhood amenities, and significantly more infrastructure is needed to serve relatively few homes. A strategy centered on infill across the neighborhood would promote moderate increases in housing density, such as through encouraging duplexes, triplexes, and similar small-scale multifamily, as well as cottage clusters and ADUs. These types of housing development are closely aligned with statewide housing in SB 382. This development pattern can provide additional smaller and more affordable housing options, in line with trends in housing needs, while blending into the existing Heights context and making efficient use of existing infrastructure networks.

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Summary of anticipated future land use changes:

- *Designate existing lower density residential portions of the Heights as future land uses that allow incrementally greater development intensity to encourage a gradual shift towards greater density in the future.* In response to statewide legislation aimed at addressing Montana housing availability and affordability challenges, the City of Billings recently made zoning code changes to accommodate more of the small-scale multifamily uses listed above in existing zoning districts. Designating existing neighborhoods as future land use designations with incrementally greater development density and use allowances (such as applying UR to areas that are currently most similar to URL) will align with the recent code changes and help encourage their implementation. This supports the opportunity for current and future property owners to make greater use of their property and establish new residential opportunities that help accommodate future growth.

- *Maximize development potential on vacant and underutilized sites.* An infill strategy increases neighborhood density gradually over time, and therefore change may be slow and characterized by individual projects that each have a fairly small impact on housing availability and neighborhood livability. The vacant and underutilized sites identified as part of this plan update may be more immediately available for infill or redevelopment as compared to the gradual density increases expected across the neighborhood. Because new development on these sites can have a more immediate and significant impact on the neighborhood, the future land use map would designate these vacant and underutilized sites with the highest intensity designation that is still compatible with their surroundings.

- *Discourage outward neighborhood expansion.* Based on housing analysis completed for this plan update, development within existing city limits has the potential to yield adequate housing units to serve the future Heights population growth, without needing to rely on expansion into the large agricultural and rural residential areas within the Limits of Annexation and beyond. As part of citywide growth management efforts, policies could limit expansion of low density residential areas, and encourage annexing county islands while leaving peripheral areas outside the city limits until the additional space is needed based on population growth. This would be expected to increase infill development activity in order to meet demand for housing, commercial, and other uses within the current boundary of the Heights. Greater infill development in established neighborhood areas can improve walkability and neighborhood vitality, as opposed to isolation that comes with suburban sprawl.

Initial Evaluation of Scenario C:

This scenario focuses on multiple strategies to encourage infill development to move the neighborhood towards meeting the housing needs of its future population. Some elements of this strategy build on existing efforts across the state to allow for “gentle density” incorporated into established low-density residential neighborhoods. However, it is anticipated that the process of creating more housing in these established neighborhoods will be slow-going. For that reason, specific new development and redevelopment focus could be placed on vacant and underutilized sites in this scenario, which may help catalyze more development in creative ways, potentially helping foster a greater mix of residential and commercial uses and contributing to neighborhood vitality.

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An infill focus has the advantage of being particularly responsive to the development surrounding infill sites, rather than attempting to establish new development areas based on assumptions of community needs and desires. It also allows for efficient use of existing infrastructure in established neighborhoods. However, the need to fit into areas on a case-by-case process can limit impact of each individual project as compared to new higher intensity development that may be possible surrounding larger neighborhood nodes of development.

Next Steps

The Future Land Use Plan for the Heights may expand on one of the three scenarios above, or combine elements from multiple scenarios to create a comprehensive growth strategy. Following City review, consideration, and feedback on the proposed growth scenarios, DOWL will compile a description of the preferred future land use scenario and growth strategy, along with a draft Future Land Use Map.

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APPENDIX 3: IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

Implementation Checklist

Housing

Goal 1: Facilitate the development of a variety of adequate housing to meet anticipated housing needs in the Heights.

- Strategy 1: Encourage the development of tri- and fourplexes as density transitions between larger multifamily developments and surrounding lower density residential areas.
- Strategy 2: Monitor for other statewide policies, goals, or best practices for the promotion of housing development.

Goal 2: Encourage strategic infill development while preserving character of the neighborhood.

- Strategy 1: Promote the development or redevelopment of parcels identified as vacant or underutilized in this Neighborhood Plan.
- Strategy 2: Develop an incentive program to encourage infill housing development within existing neighborhood developed areas, rather than expansion into surrounding tracts in the Limits of Annexation.
- Strategy 3: Work with the Community Development Division to identify grants to support the infill housing development program.
- Strategy 4: Work with the City of Billings Public Utility Department to update the Infill Policy and develop incentives to create affordable infill housing, such as through:
    - Impact fee reductions (MCA 76-25-302(1)(d))
    - Homeowner education about the process for utility connections when adding residential units to already-served, developed lots
    - Streamline permit approval processes for development of additional units, including ADUs and multi-unit dwellings
    - Reducing the Arterial Construction Fee assessments for infill housing, including ADUs and multi-unit dwellings

Goal 3: Facilitate development of affordable housing types.

- Strategy 1: Amend Article 27-300 to allow greater lot coverage in residential zones.

Economic Development

Goal 1: Create an organized, collaborative network to promote businesses in the Heights.

- Strategy 1: Reinvigorate the Heights Business Group, its online presence, and related neighborhood business marketing activities.
- Strategy 2: The Heights Business Group should maintain a directory of existing businesses in the Heights.

- Strategy 3: Prioritize communication with the Heights Business Group on City matters impacting the area businesses. This could include:
    - Identify a specific contact person at the City that can assist with neighborhood economic development issues and opportunities, such as in the Community Development and/or Finance departments.
    - Maintain regular communication between the Heights Business Group and the City.
    - Notify the Heights Business Group of development applications within the Heights.
- Strategy 4: Explore opportunities for greater collaboration with local organizations including the Billings Chamber of Commerce and Visit Billings to promote business and recreation in the Heights.

Goal 2: Promote specific economic development activities in strategic locations.

- Strategy 1: Request City Council approval to approve a committee and/or project to study the feasibility of developing an Urban Renewal District (URD) in the Heights, to enable Tax Increment Financing (TIF).
- Strategy 2: Provide financial incentives such as TIF to attract new businesses and corporations.
- Strategy 3: Identify and facilitate development in specific economic development focus areas that present opportunities for more commercial and mixed-use development.
    - The area north of Wicks Lane is a prime development corridor that could provide essential services to the Heights.
    - Opportunities at key intersections along new road connections to the Heights (the Bypass and Belt Loop).
- Strategy 4: Inventory vacant commercial buildings or potential commercial lots for infill development.
- Strategy 5: Encourage repurposing and/or redeveloping of vacant commercial buildings, such as through reducing impact fees or permit fees, or streamlining the permitting process for redevelopment sites.
- Strategy 6: As the neighborhood expands north to include existing County heavy commercial and industrial land, consider supporting new industrial zoning to capture potential industrial development and the employment opportunities it could bring to the neighborhood.
- Strategy 7: In response to community concerns about overdevelopment of some commercial uses such as casinos, banks, and car washes, consider potential limitations to the locations of these uses, which could allow preserving space in key economic development areas for specific uses the community feels are lacking, such as restaurants, entertainment, and local and/or small and medium businesses.

Goal 3: Attract and retain local and small/medium businesses in the Heights.

- Strategy 1: The Heights Business Group, in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, could create an active marketing campaign targeting small and medium businesses to establish or invest in a Heights location.
- Strategy 2: Develop a brochure to distribute to the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Realtors to market the Heights for business opportunities. Materials could provide a variety of relevant information such as:
    - Population and economic data and projections
    - Real estate listings, highlighting potential locations for businesses of a range of types and sizes

- Strategy 3: Encourage the construction and renovation of attractive office buildings with the infrastructure to support starter businesses and attract small and medium established businesses.
- Strategy 4: Expand on existing or past “Small Business Saturday” and local shopping and dining marketing campaigns and events to highlight and promote local and/or small and medium businesses in the Heights, particularly restaurants and entertainment options.

Goal 4: Support safe and convenient physical access to businesses in the Heights.

- Strategy 1: Review the access study completed by the Montana Department of Transportation for Main Street and identify recommendations that can be prioritized for implementation.
- Strategy 2: In future roadway planning and design projects, prioritize safety and comfort of non-motorized infrastructure along Main Street to improve safety and convenience of access to businesses.
- Strategy 3: Through transportation system planning and design efforts, continue to encourage use of alternate routes for traffic that will lessen the intensity of the existing traffic on Main Street, allowing smoother traffic operations to gain access to businesses.

Goal 5: Improve the aesthetics of commercial areas in the Heights (Main Street and elsewhere).

- Strategy 1: Encourage high quality development guidelines to ensure organized growth and development of businesses.
- Strategy 2: Review and update the city site development code for parking and landscaping.
- Strategy 3: Encourage more streetscape and landscape design during reconstruction projects on the main transportation routes.
- Strategy 4: Update the city sign code.
- Strategy 5: Consider potential financial incentives for site and building aesthetic upgrades along Main Street, such as a façade improvement grant program or encouraging public art installations.

Utilities

Goal 1: Promote efficient use of existing and new/upgraded utility infrastructure via infill development.

- Strategy 1: The City is planning to update its Infill Policy in 2027. As part of this update, consider establishing an incentive program to encourage infill development to facilitate efficient use of existing and new/upgraded utility infrastructure.
- Strategy 2: Following adoption of a new Infill Policy, work collaboratively with developers to encourage the use of City incentive programs and other strategies to make efficient use of existing utility infrastructure and new or upgraded facilities.

Goal 2: Improve stormwater drainage.

- Strategy 1: The City of Billings Public Works Department and staff focused on the new stormwater program should collaborate to inventory and develop a list of areas where standing water and runoff is a problem.

- Strategy 2: Regularly update a Stormwater Master Plan for all areas of the Heights.
- Strategy 3: As part of the planning process, identify mitigation projects to address drainage issues.
- Strategy 4: Continue to include stormwater improvements in the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Strategy 5: Incorporate new technology and best practices into public and private design requirements related to stormwater runoff and detention.

Community Facilities

Goal 1: Maintain an open line of communication between the School District and Heights residents.

- Strategy 1: During monthly Heights Neighborhood Task Force meetings, request an update and report from a School Board Representative to inform and educate residents. This should include:
    - School District projects
    - School District future plans (facilities, operations, etc.)
    - Major discussions held by the School Board
- Strategy 2: Inform the School District on concerns, questions and recommendations residents have concerning education in the Heights.
- Strategy 3: The School District Facilities Director can serve as a contact person for suggestions and concerns about school district property in need of improvement or maintenance.

Goal 2: Provide a range of educational opportunities for school-aged children and people of all ages.

- Strategy 1: The School District should continue to offer and expand education programs and “School within a School” opportunities to serve the growing and increasingly diverse student population in Billings, including:
    - Freshman-specific programming
    - Early college
    - Multilingual programs
    - Career and vocational programs
    - Adult education
- Strategy 2: The City should explore strategies to expand childcare offerings in partnership with the school district.
- Strategy 3: As diverse program offerings continue to expand, these should be distributed throughout Billings, including in the Heights.
- Strategy 4: As part of regular strategic planning efforts, the Billings Public Library should explore feasibility for establishing a branch library in the Heights.
- Strategy 5: As part of a potential future library expansion in the Heights, include additional indoor space for community gathering and events, along with education and recreation programming for people of all ages.

Goal 3: Add and improve parks and recreation amenities to serve a variety of age groups.

- Strategy 1: Maintain community awareness of potential and approved CIP projects, and advocate for their implementation through Heights Task Force engagement with the City.
- Strategy 2: Implement the Castle Rock Park Master Plan, which includes the addition of many facilities identified by Heights residents as important in past and present Neighborhood Plan community engagement:
    - Indoor multi-purpose facility. The Community Center in the Master Plan could serve this purpose.
    - Outdoor gathering space. The Amphitheater and Market Space in the Master Plan could serve this purpose.
    - Event Pavilion. This would provide additional outdoor gathering space while also executing a 2006 Neighborhood Plan goal of developing a picnic shelter at Castle Rock Park.
    - Indoor swimming pool. Expanding swimming facilities is a longtime and ongoing goal of Heights residents.
    - Multi-sport athletic facility improvements. The Master Plan includes improvements to the large multi-purpose athletic field, a new basketball court, and a new sand volleyball court. which also contributes to implementation of 2006 Neighborhood Plan goals for multi-functional athletic facilities located adjacent to schools.
    - Trails. The Master Plan includes a trail surrounding the entire park and connecting park amenities.
    - Playground. The Master Plan includes a significant playground upgrade with the addition of climbing boulders.
    - Pickleball courts. Adjacent to existing tennis courts, the Master Plan includes several pickleball courts.
- Expanded vehicular parking is also proposed at both existing parking lots on Wicks Lane and Nutter Boulevard, which will support an expected increase in park visitors associated with new park amenities.
- Strategy 3: Implement other facilities proposed in the Castle Rock Master Plan that are above and beyond what the community requested in the engagement survey for the past and present neighborhood plan update:
    - Pump track
    - Adult exercise equipment
    - Additional shelters and public art installations throughout the park
- Strategy 4: Explore development of pocket parks and community gardens that can have a small footprint and be scattered throughout additional parts of the neighborhood that have less access to parks.

Goal 4: Maintain a safe and connected network of trails, parks, and other community facilities.

- Strategy 1: Implement trail projects identified in the Trail Master Plan and Long-Range Transportation Plan (see Chapter 9 – Transportation).
- Strategy 2: In future opportunities for the neighborhood to participate in trails and other non-motorized transportation planning, identify additional trail links needed and identify priority and funding mechanisms.
- Strategy 3: Regularly review and update trail, park, and community facility maps and signage, including wayfinding signage highlighting connections between different parks and community facilities.
- Strategy 4: In addition to ongoing implementation of Phases I and II of the Safe Routes to School Plan (see Section 9.3.1), work with Billings Police Department and Public Works to identify other locations for potential pedestrian and traffic safety improvements or reduced speed limits around schools, parks, and other community facilities.

Public Safety

Goal 1: Improve pedestrian safety and traffic safety and enforcement in key areas.

- Strategy 1: Continue implementation of the Safe Routes to School plan. In the future, periodically review safe routes to school (for non-motorized transportation like walking, biking, and rolling) from existing and new residential developments and subdivisions (see Chapter 9 – Transportation).
- Strategy 2: As part of a future update to the Bikeway and Trails Master Plan, review safety of non-motorized transportation routes around parks and community facilities, as well as connections between and within neighborhoods around these public places (see Chapter 9 – Transportation).
- Strategy 3: Continue implementation of the Public Works Engineering Division traffic calming program. In areas where a need is identified, install safety features around schools, parks, and other community facilities to discourage speeding and cut-through traffic. Neighborhood input on traffic calming should continually be gathered as part of future transportation planning efforts (see Chapter 9 – Transportation).
- Strategy 4: Enhance police patrol for speeding and other traffic violations around school areas at school rush hour times.

Goal 2: Facilitate police, fire, and medical emergency response operations through public safety facilities, neighborhood design, and community awareness.

- Strategy 1: Plan for additional public safety facilities in the Heights in the future, including a police substation and additional fire station.
- Strategy 2: Enforce code violations and obstructions of emergency access points.
- Strategy 3: Monitor development on the Heights' periphery that pushes the limits of acceptable response times (such as to the neighborhood's northwest), and anticipate future need for a new or adjusted fire station location to serve these expansion areas.
- Strategy 4: Continue public safety outreach efforts and crime reports with the Heights Task Force to maintain and increase community awareness of police, fire, and emergency medical response activities and other relevant public safety topics.

Goal 3: Design public spaces with adequate lighting and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.

- Strategy 1: The Heights Task Force should partner with the City and Northwestern Energy to survey street light locations and lighting conditions throughout the entire Heights neighborhood. This process can help identify locations where additional lighting is needed, as well as help track locations for reference during future maintenance and expansion of street light coverage.
- Strategy 2: Promote architectural lighting and cut off lighting to enhance lighting while protecting against additional light pollution.

- Strategy 3: Integrate public parks and community facilities in neighborhoods to facilitate natural surveillance by passerby and neighborhood residents ("eyes on the street"). Other than any required landscaping, limit vegetation and sight-obscuring fences, walls, or other divisions along street frontages and within parks to facilitate visual access and safety.
- Strategy 4: Use clear, accessible signage, locking fences and gates, and locking doors on community facilities when needed to limit public access during certain hours.
- Strategy 5: When designing any streets, parks, or other community facilities, conduct thorough outreach with people of different gender, age, race, income, ability, and other characteristics. This will help create a shared sense of community pride and ownership over these spaces that is relevant to all Heights residents, regardless of background.
- Strategy 6: Using the new Citizen Problem Reporter tool available online through the Public Works website, the Heights Task Force and neighborhood residents can continue to report non-emergency maintenance issues at parks, on streets, or at other community facilities in order to facilitate faster maintenance and restoring the space to its previous condition.
    - The Heights Task Force and other neighborhood groups could consider establishing neighborhood clean-up and beautification events and ongoing initiatives to extend neighborhood maintenance and aesthetic benefits, while fostering greater community sense of ownership and pride.
    - Involve the Heights Business Association in these efforts to promote non-residential private property improvement, which may increase sense of safety along Main Street and in other non-residential areas.
- Strategy 7: Encourage community-led events in public spaces during daytime and evening hours. This helps to activate spaces and create community connections.

Transportation

Goal 1: Improve vehicular transportation in the Heights (improve safety and reduce travel times, congestion, fuel consumption, and emissions).

- Strategy 1: Implement the Heights-specific projects identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan. (This should include the 2023 LRTP and projects that may be included in future LRTP updates.) Residents and organizations can advocate for project implementation.
- Strategy 2: Heights residents and organizations should alert transportation agencies of additional roadway improvements that may be needed, and participate in all future transportation plan updates that impact the Heights, along with tracking funding for implementation of these projects through the CIP, TIP, and STIP documents each year.
- Strategy 3: Review signal operations and make changes as needed to improve operating conditions (level of service), particularly on arterial roadways.
- Strategy 4: Monitor changes in traffic volumes and patterns on new arterial roadways serving the Heights (Billings Bypass and Skyway Drive).
- Strategy 5: Review policies impacting access management and curb cuts on existing and new arterials and collectors, and minimize permitted access points to ensure that they can maintain their intended functionality.

- Strategy 6: Continually assess future roadways that will be needed, and identify these proposed roadways on new functional classification maps so that the community is aware and rights-of-way can be reserved.
- Strategy 7: Review zoning and subdivision code and revise as needed with provisions to ensure connectivity between new subdivisions / development areas.
- Strategy 8: Require traffic analysis and identification of potential mitigation measures for major developments, as determined by MPO-determined thresholds for future trips and level of service.
- Strategy 9: Encourage ongoing dialogue to help improve the vehicular transportation system, and consider other suggestions and priorities from Heights residents for future planning and projects, including:
    - Balance improved connectivity with traffic calming and protections against excessive speeding and cut-through traffic
    - Address congestion around schools
    - Improve traffic enforcement
    - Improve road maintenance, including snow and ice removal
    - Address safety concerns about freight traffic around the Airport Road area
    - Consider implementation of roundabouts in the Heights
    - Consider widening some arterials that experience congestion

Goal 2: Improve public transportation in the Heights.

- Strategy 1: Implement the Heights-specific transit route and service changes identified in the Transit Development Plan. (This should include the 2022 TDP and projects that may be included in future TDP or other transportation plan updates.)
- Strategy 2: Implement the Heights Transfer Center project.
- Strategy 3: Consider Complete Streets elements supporting public transit during every roadway design or improvement project.
- Strategy 4: Continue to collect input from Heights residents, businesses, and organizations about transit system improvements, future transit plan updates that impact the Heights, and prioritization of projects for funding.
- Strategy 5: Incorporate other suggestions and priorities from Heights residents in future planning and projects, including:
    - Provide bus shelters
    - Increase frequency of service over time, and considering extended evening hours of operation
    - Increase education on how to use MET transit, and make informational materials more user-friendly
    - Consider expanded routes, such as between the Heights and the West End or serving areas like Alkali Creek or Mary Street
    - Consider opportunities for rideshare integration or park and ride
    - Work with the school district to find better solutions for student transportation, particularly for students who are not near MET routes but are not in locations that are eligible for school bus service

Goal 3: Improve non-motorized transportation in the Heights (including improvements to the extent and quality of facilities for walking and bicycling).

- Strategy 1: Implement the Heights-specific projects identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan and Bikeway and Trails Master Plan. (This should include the 2023 LRTP and projects that may be included in future LRTP or non-motorized plan updates.) Residents and organizations can advocate for project implementation.
- Strategy 2: Implement the Heights-specific projects identified in the Safe Routes to School plans. Residents and organizations can advocate for project implementation.
- Strategy 3: Consider Complete Streets elements supporting non-motorized transportation during every roadway design or improvement project.
- Strategy 4: Heights residents and organizations should alert transportation agencies of additional non-motorized improvements that may be needed, and participate in all future transportation plan updates that impact the Heights, along with tracking funding for implementation of these projects through the CIP, TIP, and STIP documents each year.
- Strategy 5: Incorporate other suggestions and priorities from Heights residents in future planning and projects, including:
    - Prioritize adding missing sidewalks throughout the neighborhood
    - Prioritize protected bike lanes (on-street parking or painted buffers could separate bikes from the road)
    - Require more street lighting to improve safety
    - Improve crossing safety and consider changes to turn arrows at intersections
    - Lower speed limits in some areas
    - Add more protected pathways
    - Add bike aid stations and restrooms along Kiwanis Trail
    - Add connection across the State Trust vacant land
    - Add a bike lane on Mary Street

Future Land Use

Goal 1: Encourage the development of primary and secondary nodes of commercial and compact residential development.

- Strategy 1: Identify zoning map changes that allow a more compact, urban, walkable urban node pattern of development around primary nodes, rather than the existing auto-oriented pattern in the Heights. Implementation concepts may include:
    - Offer increased zoning allowance in exchange for desired patterns of development, potentially as part of future Planned Neighborhood Development code updates.
    - Through a future update to the Infill Policy and potentially other modifications to existing commercial and mixed-use zones, encourage desired land use and infill development on underutilized portions of existing sites.
    - Explore potential financial incentives to spur economic development in these locations.
- Strategy 2: Encourage the development of secondary nodes at identified key intersections within otherwise residential areas by implementing the Future Land Use Map with zoning for medium density housing and light mixed-use development in these locations, as multifamily development and neighborhood commercial can support each other. The City could also explore potential financial incentives to spur economic development in these locations.

- Strategy 3: Engage with the Heights Business Association, commercial property owners, and local economic development stakeholders to identify barriers to development in identified primary and secondary nodes, and potential ways to address these barriers.
- Strategy 4: Work with MET Transit to monitor the Heights Transfer Center project and other potential bus route changes and develop a long-term strategy for transit-oriented development in the Heights.
- Strategy 5: Work with MDT to implement non-motorized transportation and other safety and urban design improvements along Main Street, with a goal of transitioning toward a more human-scale corridor than a high-traffic highway feel.
- Strategy 6: Work with the State of Montana to revisit strategy for encouraging development on the State land adjacent to the identified "West Heights Town Center" primary node.

Goal 2: Encourage infill housing development that can meet the evolving needs of the growing neighborhood.

- Strategy 1: Adjacent to primary nodes, promote high density multifamily development through the following potential strategies:
    - Consider pursuing targeted, City-led rezones
    - Potential for City support of mixed-income and affordable housing development
    - Use other strategies identified in the Montana Land Use Planning Act to encourage more housing development (see Chapter 4 – Housing)
- Strategy 2: Adjacent to secondary nodes, promote medium density housing development through the following potential strategies:
    - Consider pursuing targeted, City-led rezones
    - Potential for City support of mixed-income and affordable housing development
    - Use other strategies identified in the Montana Land Use Planning Act to encourage more housing development (see Chapter 4 – Housing)
- Strategy 3: Surrounding primary and secondary nodes, as well as anywhere infill residential development is occurring in the central areas of the neighborhood and near major streets, encourage housing development that aligns with the character of the Urban Residential future land use designation (including a range of compact single-family, multifamily, and mixed-use development) rather than lower density single-family development patterns. The City could consider the following potential strategies:
    - Create a zoning overlay for the areas surrounding nodes, with special design standards
    - Modify zoning code to facilitate and encourage greater residential density in these areas, such as through incentives
- Strategy 4: Work with the Community Development Division to identify potential financial incentives like low-interest loans, fee waivers, and grants that could be offered to housing developers proposing projects surrounding primary and secondary nodes.
- Strategy 5: Work with the State of Montana to encourage residential development on the State land adjacent to the identified "West Heights Town Center" primary node. Consider the following potential strategies:

- Meet with local market-rate and affordable housing developers to identify primary barriers to development
- Consider pursuing public-private partnerships for development

Goal 3: Prepare for future annexation and development of additional county lands.

- Strategy 1: Update the City's Limits of Annexation to include all developed county land within the Heights neighborhood in the Zone 1 Annexation Petition area (both "county islands" and developed areas on the periphery that are included in the Future Land Use Map).
- Strategy 2: Work with utility providers to identify extensions and upgrades that would be needed to serve new development or redevelopment areas.
- Strategy 3: Explore potential financial incentives that could be offered to county landowners to encourage annexation and redevelopment.

Goal 4: Encourage responsible development around existing and new major corridors.

- Strategy 1: As additional new roadways are planned in the future, continue to prepare corridor studies and consider zoning designations and standards for lands on these corridors to address site design and architectural standards intended to support pedestrian orientation.