

**MINUTES
OF THE BILLINGS CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING
August 24, 2026**

The Billings City Council met in regular session in the City Council Chambers, located at 316 N. 26th Street, 5th Floor, Billings, Montana, at 5:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Nelson

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Mayor Nelson

INVOCATION: Councilmember Pitman

ROLL CALL:

Present: Councilmember Kendra Shaw, Ward 1
Councilmember Mark Nicholson, Ward 1
Councilmember Roy Neese, Ward 2
Councilmember Denis Pitman, Ward 2
Councilmember Amy Aguirre, Ward 3
Councilmember Bill Kennedy, Ward 3
Councilmember Scott Aspenlieder, Ward 4
Councilmember Andrew Lindley, Ward 4
Councilmember Mike Boyett, Ward 5
Councilmember Tony O'Donnell, Ward 5
Mayor Mike Nelson

Staff Present: Kevin Iffland, Interim City Administrator
Gavin Woltjer, Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Director
Gina Dahl, City Attorney
Denise Bohlman, City Clerk
Jessica McKee, Deputy Staff Attorney
Daniela Pavuk, Assistant City Attorney
Jeff Roach, Aviation and Transit Director
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager
Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director
Anna Vickers, Planning Manager
Lora Mattox, Transportation Planner
Mac Fogelson, City Engineer
Derick Miller, Street and Traffic Superintendent

MINUTES:

- August 10, 2026

Moved by Councilmember Shaw

Seconded by Councilmember Neese

APPROVED 11-0

COURTESIES:

Councilmember Nicholson recognized the legacy of Montana-born vaccine researcher Dr. Maurice Hilleman and highlighted the significant public-health impact of vaccines developed by Dr. Hilleman and his research teams. He also noted that RiverStone Health was having a walk-in immunization clinic on August 27th and encouraged residents to take advantage of available vaccination services.

Councilmember Aspenlieder thanked staff from the Police Department, Fire Department, and Billings Logan International Airport for their work supporting the recent air show. He said the event drew thousands of people, traffic operations went smoothly, and the behind-the-scenes coordination contributed to a safe and successful community event.

PROCLAMATIONS:

Mayor Nelson proclaimed August 31, 2026, as Overdose Awareness Day. The proclamation recognized lives lost to overdose, the effect of overdose on families and the community, the importance of reducing stigma, and the work of health-care providers, first responders, peer support specialists, recovery organizations, and community partners. The proclamation encouraged residents to learn the signs of overdose, carry naloxone when appropriate, and support individuals and families affected by substance use disorders with compassion.

Representatives of Overdose Awareness Day Montana thanked the Mayor and Council for the recognition. They described the organization's mission as raising awareness of substance use and overdose, supporting people and families affected by addiction, and honoring people lost to overdose without stigma or shame. Kim Edinger, CEO, and Carol Keenan, co-founder, were introduced and photos taken.

COUNCIL REPORTS:

Councilmember Neese noted an upcoming Budget and Finance Committee meeting on Wednesday, August 26th, at 9:00 A.M. at City Hall.

Councilmember Pitman reported that the Legislative Committee had not achieved a quorum but was continuing to compile legislative priorities for the upcoming session and requested Council feedback so the priorities could be brought forward for approval.

Councilmember Boyett noted a Council Operations Committee meeting was scheduled for Thursday, August 27th at 10:00 A.M. at City Hall.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORTS – KEVIN IFFLAND, INTERIM CITY ADMINISTRATOR

Mr. Iffland advised Council that:

- Banana Ball was held at Dehler Baseball Park the past weekend and Council had approved TIF funds to be used for additional MET transit transportation for over 1,700 ride for the event from the Downtown TIF District.
- Jennifer Robinett had been hired as the new Public Works Director and her start date was October 1, 2026.
- There is no meeting Monday, August 31, 2026, as it was a Bye-Week.
- Councilmembers needed to complete the Strategic Planning survey for preparation for upcoming Strat meetings.
- A Council photograph was scheduled for October 26, 2026, please RSVP Juliet Winger about attending on that date.
- There were no exparte communications received after 3 pm to the Mayor and Council concerning items on the Agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT on "NON-PUBLIC HEARING" Agenda Items: 1 ONLY. Speaker sign-in required. (Comments are limited to three (3) minutes or as set by the Mayor. Please sign the roster at the cart located at the back of the Council chambers or at the podium. Comments on items listed as public hearing items will be heard ONLY during the designated public hearing time for each respective item. For items not on this agenda, public comment will be taken at the end of the agenda.)

The following individual provided public comment:

- **Jeff Ketelsen**, Ward 5, commented on Consent Agenda Item 1L, questioned whether growth-related infrastructure should be funded through impact fees rather than existing taxpayers and urged Council to revisit impact-fee policy for storm sewer, fire, and police infrastructure.

There was no further public comment.

Motion: I move to approve the Consent Agenda, with the exception of Items 1E and 1M, moved for separation.

Moved by Councilmember Boyett
Seconded by Councilmember Pitman
APPROVED 11-0

1. CONSENT AGENDA

A. **Mayor Nelson recommends that Council confirm the following appointment:**

1. **Council Budget and Finance Committee.**
Replace Councilmember Scott Aspenlieder with Councilmember Andrew Lindley.

B. **Bid Awards:**

1. **Optimist Park Lighting Project.** (Opened 8/4/26) Recommend Treasure State Electrical Contracting, Inc.

Councilmember Kennedy inquire of Gavin Woltjer, Parks Director, anticipated date for the project to be concluded. Mr. Woltjer responded in approximately 60-80 days.

2. **W.O. 26-22: Grand Avenue & 56th Street West Intersection Improvements.** (Opened 8/4/26) Recommend Montana Lines, Inc.

C. **Change Order No. 1,** with Western Municipal Construction, Inc. for W.O. 26-01, Contract 2: 2026 Sewer Main Replacement.

D. **Five-Year Agreement** with Omnigo for quartermaster asset management software for the Police Department.

E. **Interlocal Agreement** with Yellowstone County for operation and maintenance of traffic signals at Central Avenue and 48th Street West.

Councilmember Neese asked whether Yellowstone County had evaluated third-party maintenance of the traffic signal and whether the City's annual charge included a premium for providing services outside the City. Mac Fogelson, City Engineer, explained that the approximately \$1,700 annual base charge reflected labor and overhead for routine maintenance, with additional time and materials billed when repairs were required. Councilmember Neese said he believed services provided to the County should include a premium similar to other City services. Councilmember Kennedy noted the longstanding City-County partnership for signal maintenance.

Motion: I move to approve Consent Agenda Item 1E.

Moved by Councilmember Boyett

Seconded by Councilmember Aguirre

APPROVED 9-2, Councilmembers Neese and Nicholson opposed

F. **Purchase** traffic controller equipment from Altitude Signal, LLC, for Public Works Streets and Traffic Department.

Councilmember Nicholson asked about traffic-controller upgrades and camera capabilities. Derick Miller, Street and Traffic Superintendent, stated the purchase would serve approximately 15 intersections, replacing unsupported controllers, and explained that the detection cameras are used to manage signal timing and do not record video.

G. **Purchase** one milling machine from Torgerson's Equipment for Public Works Streets and Traffic Department.

H. **Purchase** one Toolcat UW56 from Bobcat of Big Sky, Inc. for Public Works Streets and Traffic Department.

- I. **Authorize** the Mayor to execute a joint request letter and 3-C agreement for the redesignation of Billings Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

Councilmember O'Donnell asked whether redesignation of the Billings Metropolitan Planning Organization would diminish City Council authority. Lora Mattox, Transportation Planner, explained that the Policy Coordinating Committee would continue to include the Mayor, Yellowstone County, and MDT, and that MPO matters affecting the City would continue to come through Council for discussion and direction.

- J. **Donations** to the Billings Police Department K-9 Program for training and equipment from various donors.

- K. **Donation** of sculpture for placement at the Amend Recreation Campus (ARC) from Fidelity Charitable Donor Advised Fund Grant - Anne and Bill Cole.

- L. **Resolution 26-11363** calling for public sale of storm sewer revenue and refunding bonds, series 2026.

- M. **Second and Final Reading Ordinance 26-5935** amending BMCC, Article 21-200, Solid Waste Collection and Disposal.

Motion: I move to approve Consent Agenda Item 1M.

Moved by Councilmember Neese
Seconded by Councilmember Lindley

Motion to Amend: I move to include a minor amendment to Section 21-207(a) concerning the number of residential carts provided by the City from 2 to 1 but additional residential carts may be requested for an additional fee, subject to approval based on available storage and collection space.

Moved by Councilmember Neese
Seconded by Councilmember Lindley

APPROVED 8-3, Aspenlieder, Kennedy and Nicholson opposed

- N. **Bills for the Weeks of:**

1. July 27, 2026
2. August 3, 2026

REGULAR AGENDA:

2. PUBLIC HEARING for land use contrary to zoning for an Electronic Message Display (EMD) wall sign at Highland Elementary School located at 729 Parkhill. No Council action is necessary.

Anna Vickers, Planning Manager, presented the request to replace the school's existing static message sign with an electronic message display in the Public, Civic and Institutional zoning district. Ms. Vickers explained that Council does not vote on a land use contrary to zoning; instead, Council conducts a public hearing and may provide suggestions. Any future sign would still require a sign permit and would be subject to City sign regulations, including dimming requirements, limits on flashing, and minimum message-display durations.

Justin Huck, the principal at Highland Elementary School stated that the current sign was outdated and required staff to use a ladder to manually change messages, including during winter weather. The electronic sign would improve safety and modernize communication. Councilmembers discussed compliance with City lighting and flashing restrictions, and the school representative confirmed the school would comply.

During the public hearing, members of the public attempted to speak about immigration enforcement rather than the Highland Elementary sign. Mayor Nelson directed the speaker to remain on the noticed hearing topic and, after continued off-topic remarks, Council recessed briefly. No Council action was required on the land use contrary to zoning request.

Mayor Nelson called for recess at 6:06 P.M. Mayor Nelson reconvened the meeting at 6:13 P.M.

3. PUBLIC HEARING AND RESOLUTION 26-11364 creating the Billings Airport Authority and Board of Commissioners. Staff recommends approval.

Spencer Gillette of Steven Baldwin Associates Aviation Consulting (SBA) presented the proposed resolution, explaining that it followed the May 26, 2026 Council direction and the work of the Airport Governance Transition Steering Committee. He said the resolution established the governance structure and statutory powers of the proposed Airport Authority. He recommended adding "or becomes physically or mentally incapacitated" to Section 2.4 as an additional cause for removal of a board member.

Aviation and Transit Director Jeff Roach thanked the steering committee and participants for the work completed and encouraged approval so the transition could continue. Councilmember O'Donnell identified the phrase "City Council-elect" in the final provision and questioned its legal meaning. City Attorney, Gina Dahl, agreed that "elect" could refer to a council that had been elected but not yet sworn into office and recommended removing the word from the last line of the last paragraph of the resolution. Councilmember O'Donnell also asked about "bank pledges" in the financial provisions, Section 5.1. Mr. Gillette explained that the term refers to securities pledged by a financial institution to protect public deposits beyond insured limits and that the practice is common for governmental funds.

Councilmember Neese described the resolution as thoroughly reviewed and said creation of the authority was an appropriate next step for a growing community.

During the public hearing, John Brewer, President and CEO of the Billings Chamber of Commerce, spoke on behalf of the Chamber and Visit Billings in support of the resolution and thanked the City for the thorough assessment process. No further public testimony was given.

Motion: Having conducted a public hearing, considered written and spoken public testimony, I move to approve a resolution creating the Billings Airport Authority and Board of Commissioners, with the following amendments - adding "or becomes physically or mentally incapacitated" to Section 2.4 as an additional cause for removal of a board member; and remove the word "elect" from "Council-elect" from the last line of the last paragraph of the resolution.

Moved by Councilmember Aspenlieder

Seconded by Councilmember Neese

APPROVED 11-0

4. PUBLIC HEARING AND RESOLUTION 26-11365 setting annual Road Maintenance District No. 6 assessments for Fiscal Year 2027. Staff recommends approval.

Finance Director Andy Zoeller explained that Road Maintenance District No. 6 supports the Briarwood emergency access road, constructed in 2015 as a secondary emergency route. Fifty-one properties are assessed annually, and the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 assessment was \$55.28 per property. Councilmember Boyett asked how the approximately \$2,800 collected each year was used. Mr. Zoeller said routine costs were limited, generally including weed spraying and occasional storm washout repairs, and that unused funds accumulate for future maintenance.

There was no public testimony given during the public hearing.

Motion: Having conducted a public hearing, considered written and spoken public testimony, I move to approve a resolution setting annual Road Maintenance District No. 6 assessments for Fiscal Year 2027, as recommended by staff.

Moved by Councilmember Boyett

Seconded by Councilmember Neese

APPROVED 11-0

5. PUBLIC HEARING AND RESOLUTION 26-11366 setting annual Park Maintenance District (PMD) assessments for Fiscal Year 2027. Staff recommends approval.

Finance Director Andy Zoeller presented the annual Park Maintenance District assessments. He reported that the City has 36 PMDs covering approximately 6,500 properties and that total assessments would be just under \$1.7 million, slightly less than the prior year and slightly below amounts anticipated during budget discussions. He explained that staff annually reviews cash balances and projected expenses to avoid over- or under-collecting. He highlighted a significant reduction in the Ironwood district related to revised plans for funding a future entryway sign.

The following individual provided public testimony:

- **Jeff Ketelsen**, Ward 5, questioned discussions he had heard regarding future park funding and criticized the possibility of increasing taxes while also considering public support for nonprofit recreation projects. He urged Council to prioritize maintenance of existing parks and City assets.

No further public testimony was given during the public hearing.

Motion: Having conducted a public hearing, considered written and spoken public testimony, I move to approve a resolution setting annual Park Maintenance District (PMD) assessments for Fiscal Year 2027, as recommended by staff.

Moved by Councilmember Shaw

Seconded by Councilmember Pitman

APPROVED 11-0

6. PUBLIC HEARING AND RESOLUTION 26-11367 establishing General, Transit, Library and Public Safety Funds mill levies for Fiscal Year 2027. Staff recommends approval.

Finance Director Andy Zoeller reported that the City's certified taxable value increased 7.6%, increasing the value of one mill from approximately \$233,000 to approximately \$250,000. He explained that the increase reflected both newly taxable property and changes in valuation or tax law. The adopted Fiscal Year 2027 budget assumed 2.95% growth in property-tax revenue, but applying the full newly taxable value under the resolution as presented would generate approximately 4.2% more revenue while still reducing the total mill levy by approximately 7.7 mills. He said the staff-recommended 236.67 mills would reduce the City tax bill on a median home by approximately \$20 per year. Levying 233.66 mills instead would reduce revenue by approximately three mills and provide an additional estimated \$7.90 annual reduction for the median home, with the difference coming from reserves.

Councilmember Kennedy said Council had adopted the budget based on the 2.95% assumption and argued that the City should remain at that level rather than increase collections after certified values became available. He emphasized that even relatively small amounts matter to taxpayers and said he would not support the staff proposal unless the levy returned to the budgeted level.

Councilmember Aspenlieder agreed that the levy should reflect the revenue level Council had previously committed to and suggested the experience may support changing the City's budget timing in future years so certified values are available before final adoption. He questioned the expected use of General Fund reserves. Mr. Zoeller explained that using the lower levy would increase General Fund reserve use to approximately \$920,000 if all budgeted expenditures were made and cautioned that sustained use of reserves for operating expenses is not financially sustainable.

Councilmembers Boyett, Shaw and Lindley asked about the City's reserve target and its effect on financial strength and bonding. Mr. Zoeller said policy targets General Fund reserves at approximately 33% of expenditures, or roughly \$12.5 million, and that current reserves were near but not materially above that level. He noted that rating agencies consider reserve trends when evaluating financial stability.

Councilmember Pitman asked whether the City currently anticipated a general obligation bond need; Mr. Zoeller said he was not aware of one at that time. Other Council discussion weighed the additional taxpayer reduction against maintaining reserves and future financial flexibility.

No public testimony was given during the public hearing.

Motion: Having conducted a public hearing, considered written and spoken public testimony, I move to approve a resolution establishing General, Transit, Library and Public Safety Funds mill levies for Fiscal Year 2027 assessing at 233.66 mills.

Moved by Councilmember Aspenlieder

Seconded by Councilmember Kennedy

APPROVED 9-2, Councilmembers Shaw and Neese opposed

7. PUBLIC HEARING AND RESOLUTION 26-11368 adopting the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Amendment. Staff recommends approval.

Finance Director Andy Zoeller explained that state law requires a balanced budget and that, after closing Fiscal Year 2026, two areas required budget amendments. The Fire Department exceeded budget by approximately \$115,000, primarily because of overtime and higher motor-vehicle-part costs. Municipal Court also had reimbursable grant-related costs that exceeded the adopted budget. Mr. Zoeller stated that sufficient revenues were available to cover the expenditures.

Councilmember Boyett asked about revenues associated with the County fire services agreement (BUFSA) and whether charges are reviewed annually. Mr. Zoeller explained that the assessment was calculated each year under the agreement using actual Fire Department operating costs and the County's proportionate taxable value, with the final assessment determined after fiscal-year expenses are known.

No public testimony was given during the public hearing.

Motion: Having conducted a public hearing, considered written and spoken public testimony, I move to approve a resolution adopting the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Amendment, as recommended by staff.

Moved by Councilmember Aspenlieder

Seconded by Councilmember Boyett

APPROVED 11-0

Mayor Nelson called for a recess at 7:00 P.M. The meeting was reconvened at 7:10 P.M.

Councilmember Aspenlieder left the meeting during the recess and was absent and excused for the remainder of the meeting.

Councilmember Kennedy left the meeting at 7:25 P.M. and was absent and excused for the remainder of the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT on "NON-AGENDA ITEMS". Speaker Sign-in required. *(Restricted to ONLY items not on this printed agenda. Comments are limited to 3 minutes or as set by the Mayor. Please sign the roster at the cart located at the back of the Council chambers or at the podium.)*

The following individuals provided public comment:

- **Tessa Miller**, a Billings teacher, requested that the City consider sanctuary-city policies or, at minimum, use lawful authority to limit voluntary cooperation between local resources and federal immigration enforcement. She focused on concerns about children and families affected by immigration enforcement and urged Council to take action.
- **Jennifer Strong, Ward 3**, opposed designating Billings as a sanctuary city and thanked Council for following state law and allowing law-enforcement officers to perform their duties. She also criticized the political ideology of organizations advocating for sanctuary-city policies.
- **Katherine Schoolitz**, a Billings resident and supporter of the Billings Alliance for Immigrant Rights, requested that Council place sanctuary-city policies on a future agenda. She cited concerns regarding recent immigration detentions and asked Council to consider the legal, moral, economic, and community effects of federal immigration enforcement.
- **Maisie**, a Billings resident speaking with the Billings Alliance for Immigrant Rights, supported sanctuary-city policies and expressed concern about the effect of immigration enforcement on children, families, schools, and residents' sense of safety.
- **Lain Dorsey**, Billings, speaking with the Billings Alliance for Immigrant Rights, again urged the City to adopt sanctuary-city policies and criticized Council for not responding to prior requests for meetings or policy action.
- **Tawny Schoolitz**, Billings, asked Council to consider policies restricting the use of City personnel and City-owned or leased facilities for federal immigration-enforcement staging or holding purposes, requiring judicial warrants for access to nonpublic City property, and addressing community trust concerns. She also requested that Council consider sanctuary-city status.
- **Angela Demaray**, Yellowstone County, spoke in support of the Billings Alliance for Immigrant Rights and urged Council to use its authority to ensure that federal immigration-enforcement activity in the community complies with applicable law and safeguards children and families.
- **Lylian Eby**, Billings, and **Brooke Bigler**, Billings, each spoke in support of sanctuary-city policies and expressed concern about the treatment and separation of immigrant families and children.
- **Andria Wolf**, Billings, supported sanctuary-city policies and argued that immigrants contribute to the community and economy. She urged Council to focus on community safety, housing, education, and pathways to citizenship rather than increased immigration enforcement.
- **Aiden Dubelaux**, spoke about her family's immigrant history and urged Council to adopt measures that protect immigrant families and expand access to housing, education, citizenship assistance, and other community supports.

No further public comment was given.

COUNCIL INITIATIVES:

There were no Council initiatives.

Councilmember Pitman asked staff to work with Legal on language that could be added to the non-agenda public comment notice explaining that Council generally listens rather than engages in back-and-forth discussion because items raised during public comment have not been noticed for Council action. Staff agreed to review possible disclaimer language.

ADJOURN: 7:40 P.M.



CITY OF BILLINGS

BY:

Mike Nelson, Mayor

ATTEST:

BY:

Denise R. Bohlman, City Clerk