CITY OF BILLINGS

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

November 2, 2026 - 5:30 PM

Council Chambers - City Hall, 316 N. 26th St., Billings, Montana

Council Present

Mayor Nelson
Councilmember Shaw
Councilmember Nicholson
Councilmember Neese
Councilmember Pitman
Councilmember Aguirre
Councilmember Kennedy
Councilmember Aspenlieder (Via Zoom)
Councilmember Lindley
Councilmember Boyett
Councilmember O'Donnell (Via Zoom)

Absent/Excused

Staff Present

Kevin Iffland, Interim City Administrator
Andy Zoeller, Finance Director
Daniela Pavuk, Assistant City Attorney

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)

Mayor Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M. and described a trial public-comment sign-in procedure intended to improve the accuracy of speaker names and topics and reduce time between speakers. Speakers were asked to complete a form and be ready when called; the existing three-minute speaking limit remained in effect. The Mayor also directed that signs not obstruct other audience members' views.

- Ryan Starks encouraged Council to enforce public-comment rules consistently and address disruptive conduct without limiting orderly speakers.
- Bailey Desper called for a comprehensive housing-first approach, more deeply affordable housing, homelessness prevention, rental assistance, supportive services and greater reporting of housing outcomes.
- Wanda Kalgren discussed senior and disability incomes and described the gap between fixed income and housing, utility, health-care and food expenses, particularly rising mobile-home lot rents.
- Wesley (last name illegible) identifying as unhoused, described the difficulties of securing housing despite working, family medical challenges, periods of sleeping outside and the need for more accessible community assistance.

1. RiverStone Health – Nurse Family Partnership.

Eric Owen, RiverStone Health, reported that the State of Montana's September request for proposals for federal pass-through home-visiting funds no longer included Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) as an eligible model. The change affects a program offered in three Montana counties and removes funding representing approximately 40 percent of RiverStone's direct NFP budget, as well as state-paid national program-support fees. He said continuing NFP in its current form after January 1, 2027, would not be financially sustainable. Kristen Bonner, Home Services, spoke of the current numbers for the NFP program. Mr. Owen described its intention to pursue the next seven-year award through the evidence-based Parents as Teachers model, adapting its existing home-visiting capabilities to continue nurse-led services for pregnant clients and other medically or socially high-risk families. The City has provided nearly $200,000 annually for approximately three years and is entering the fourth year of a five-year agreement. They estimated that City funding currently supports services for approximately 30 clients, generally equivalent to roughly two NFP nurses with intensive caseloads.

Council asked what measures supported using prevention and public-safety dollars for the program. RiverStone identified reductions in family violence, substance use and related risks, as well as improved employment and family outcomes. A representative cited national NFP research on juvenile justice, maternal justice involvement and substance use. Councilmember Kennedy requested local year-by-year outcome information demonstrating the effects of the City's investment. Members also asked to see the state's list of eligible alternative programs and discussed whether resources might better support other evidence-based initiatives, including programs associated with the Family Justice Center.

Councilmembers raised questions about the existing agreement and potential termination provisions; legal counsel advised that the agreement would need to be reviewed before determining its contractual effect. Discussion emphasized preserving the funds for prevention while broadly evaluating available providers and interventions. Members also expressed appreciation for RiverStone's work and clarified that seeking alternatives was not a criticism of its services.

Public Comment: No speakers signed up for this item.

Councilmember Neese moved to direct staff to issue a request for information (RFI) for evidence-based preventive programs that could replace or use the approximately $200,000 currently allocated to NFP, with the Family Justice Center and other eligible programs included for consideration. Councilmember Kennedy seconded. The motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote. No new funding recipient was selected at this work session.

2. FY28 – FY32 Capital Improvement Plan.

Finance Director Andy Zoeller introduced the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as a prioritization and financial-planning document, rather than an appropriation. It generally covers capital projects costing more than $50,000 and lasting longer than one year; vehicles and routine maintenance are addressed separately. The proposed FY28–FY32 plan totals approximately $491 million, with approximately $81 million programmed in FY28 as the starting point for the next budget cycle. Large investments are concentrated in Public Works and the airport.

Featured projects included fire-station improvements, an evidence-facility expansion, park lot replacements and major roadway projects. Zoeller highlighted approximately $15.7 million in projects specifically directed at safe routes to school over five years, plus portions of additional road projects serving that purpose. He explained that the plan assumes future rate adjustments, including approximately 4 percent annual street-maintenance increases and larger stormwater increases early in the period; adoption of the CIP would not itself authorize any rate change.

Particular attention was given to the South Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. Proposed expenditures included a replacement of Fire Station 2, associated relocation of Parks and Recreation shop space, and two phases of paving remaining gravel residential streets. Staff advised that use of TIF dollars instead of special improvement districts for those streets would depart from existing City policy. The initial spending scenario projected approximately $750,000 annually for other development incentives, based on conservative assumptions that did not incorporate future district growth.

Councilmembers Kennedy and Aspenlieder cautioned against directing too much TIF revenue to City projects at the expense of private investment. Requests included a clearer map of the streets to be paved, a three-to-five-year history of district revenue growth, and alternative timing or phasing of gravel-street projects. Councilmember Shaw noted the need to address reservoir-site park improvements before other work makes them more expensive. Councilmember Pitman encouraged residents and advisory groups to review the CIP and communicate priorities to their representatives. Members also emphasized the value of continued infrastructure investment and the impact of future utility rates on residents.

Staff stated the plan was scheduled for Budget and Finance Committee review on November 18. Adoption was tentatively targeted for November 23, but could move into December if needed. Staff indicated an amendment/comment form would be circulated so Councilmembers could submit proposed changes for committee review.

Public Comment: No speakers signed up for this item.

3. Animal Sheltering Services – Committee Recommendations.

Interim City Administrator Kevin Iffland presented recommendations from an animal-sheltering committee that had met three times. The discussion addressed a narrower City-funded service scope, completion of the existing request-for-proposals (RFP) process, possible use of the City's shelter facility and the outstanding proposed month-to-month agreement with Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter (YVAS). The Mayor asked Council to consider the points separately to clarify staff direction.

Members discussed revising City code to focus municipal sheltering responsibilities on dogs at large, dangerous or injured animals, court-ordered holds, and lost or abandoned dogs rather than attempting to provide all services for cats and other small domestic animals. Several members stressed that the ordinance wording, including whether to describe the program as "limited service" or "not full-service," would be reviewed when a draft returned to Council. Spay/neuter efforts and public-health responsibilities were also discussed. Legal staff were already preparing ordinance amendments.

On procurement, Council discussed allowing the RFP evaluation committee to complete its review and negotiate an initial agreement, potentially for one year to assess cost, animal volumes and performance. Any resulting contract would return for Council approval. Members

underscored that Council should not improperly interfere in bidder selection. Council also reviewed the possibility of a contractor using the City's existing animal facility, with utility, cleaning, maintenance, improvements and shared animal-control arrangements documented in a contract. Discussion clarified that facility use should be considered, not required regardless of the selected contractor's available facilities. Questions about the existing incinerator were raised; staff stated that it was not permitted for operation and any future use would require regulatory approval.

Public Comment:

- Triniti Halverson, YVAS Director, described the organization's 18-year history serving the City, its staff, volunteers, donors and foster network, and submitted letters of support.
- Gabrielle Fry, YVAS Director of Operations, highlighted professional training, humane handling, disease prevention, animal-control coordination and the complexity of shelter services.
- Dr. Lisa Brinley, YVAS veterinarian, described specialized shelter-medicine experience, high-volume spay/neuter services and assistance to low-income and vulnerable pet owners.

The following people spoke of the benefits provided by YVAS:

- Mari Vandersloot, Brianna Monahan, Leslie Converse, Shelley Pierce, and Steve Durrett.
- Justin Hutchinson described YVAS's long-standing community resources, medical facilities and emergency foster support, and encouraged Council to maintain a fair working relationship with the shelter.
- Tina Gaspar described an independent, personally funded animal-rescue effort and the continuing need for accessible veterinary and spay/neuter services.

A separate discussion concerned prior unanimous July 6 direction to negotiate a temporary month-to-month agreement with YVAS until the RFP process concluded. Members disagreed about why the negotiated document had not proceeded to Council and whether conditions had changed. Mr. Iffland explained it had been withheld from a draft consent agenda pending further discussion. Members emphasized that bringing the agreement to Council for a vote would not itself execute it; legal effectiveness would require Council approval and appropriate execution, and any agreement would operate prospectively rather than retroactively.

Council Directions and Motions:

Councilmember Boyett moved to direct staff to limit City-funded services to dogs at large, dangerous animals, injured animals, court-ordered holds, and lost or abandoned dogs, rather than full-service sheltering. Councilmember Pitman seconded. Motion PASSED unanimously.

Councilmember Neese moved to direct staff to continue the animal-sheltering RFP committee process in light of the contemplated ordinance changes, with any contract returning to Council for approval. Councilmember Pitman seconded. Motion PASSED unanimously.

Councilmember Boyett moved to direct staff to consider the use of the City's existing facility by a contractor, with responsibilities for utilities, cleaning, maintenance, improvements, and shared Animal Control space defined in an agreement. Councilmember Neese seconded. Motion PASSED unanimously.

Councilmember Lindley moved to direct staff to place execution of the proposed month-to-month sheltering agreement with YVAS on the November 23 business meeting consent agenda for Council consideration. Councilmember Nicholson seconded. Motion PASSED unanimously. This motion did not approve or execute the agreement.

Highlight Upcoming Agenda Items of Council Interest.

Kevin Iffland identified forthcoming initial authorization steps for possible disposition of the Minnesota Avenue parking lot and Ramada Park property. A November 16 Work Session Police Department update concerning a records-management system was also noted. Councilmember Kennedy requested that staff examine the status of Rush Park and whether the City should retain it and proceed with irrigation and grounds improvements rather than include it in a potential disposal list.

Council Discussion.

Councilmember Kennedy announced Legislative Committee meetings on November 4 and November 18, both from 3:00 to 4:30 P.M.

Council discussed the Airport Authority appointment process, noting that approximately 15 applications had been received and that a Council selection group was needed to review and recommend appointments. Councilmember Neese moved to refer Airport Authority selection and recommendations to the Council Operations Committee. Councilmember Nicholson seconded. The motion PASSED unanimously. A special Operations Committee meeting was anticipated.

Councilmember Kennedy announced a Southside task force cleanup of the Sixth Street underpass and nearby pond for Saturday, November 7, from 10:00 A.M. to noon.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items.

No speakers signed up during the final public-comment period.

Adjourn: 7:45 P.M.