

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

January 5, 2026 – 5:30 P.M.
Council Chambers – City Hall, 316 N. 26th St.

Council Present:

Councilmember Nicholson
Councilmember Shaw
Councilmember Neese
Councilmember Pitman
Councilmember Aguirre
Councilmember Lindley
Councilmember Boyett
Councilmember O'Donnell
Mayor Nelson

Councilmembers absent/excused:

Councilmember Kennedy
Councilmember Aspenlieder

Staff Present:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator; Jennifer Duray, Public Works Deputy Director and Louis Engels, Water Quality Superintendent; Gavin Woltjer, Parks/Rec/Public Lands Director and Kory Thompson, Recreation Superintendent

OATH OF OFFICE – SWEARING IN CEREMONY

Outgoing Mayor Bill Cole outlined the evening's procedure and invited Judge Kolar to administer the oath of office to the incoming Mayor and Councilmembers.

Remarks were provided by newly sworn elected officials, including acknowledgements of supporters and statements of commitment.

Mayor Cole presented Mayor Nelson with a gavel at the conclusion of the ceremony.

CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Mike Nelson called the Work Session to order and explained the purpose of a work session as an informal discussion meeting where no final decisions are expected.

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)

- Tucker Colvin - urged adoption of a Non-Discrimination Ordinance (NDO), citing recent hate incidents and need for tools for enforcement and reporting.
- Katie Harrison - requested that general comment be moved earlier in regular meetings and echoed concerns about hate incidents and need for an NDO.
- Paul Clark - raised ongoing concerns about pollution impacts of the sugar factory, requested accountability and monitoring, and advocated for solutions without forcing closure.
- Shay Reiser - urged Council to adopt an NDO and cited Montana cities that have passed similar ordinances.
- Jeff Kettleson - congratulated new Council/Mayor and encouraged unity and responsible representation.

- Sonya Davis - discouraged use of AI for official minutes/recordkeeping, supported an NDO, advocated for privacy protections, called for public safety and accountability, and requested consideration of shelter and sobering center strategies.

Public comment closed.

AGENDA CHANGE

Mayor Nelson noted Councilmember Aspenlieder was absent and recommended removing Agenda Item #3: Timing of Traffic Impact Study Submittals from the agenda. Council agreed.

AGENDA ITEM #1 – Amendment to Lockwood Water and Sewer Agreement

Presenters: Chris Kukulski, City Administrator; Jennifer Duray, Public Works Deputy Director and Louis Engels, Water Quality Superintendent

Staff provided background on the City's wholesale wastewater agreements and described a request from Lockwood Water and Sewer District to expand its service area to include a contiguous 8.5-acre commercial parcel between previously approved areas.

Key points presented:

- The City has treated Lockwood wastewater since 2008, with flow and concentration limits.
- The parcel is located near I-90 and Johnson Lane, across from Bretz RV, and is proposed for commercial development.
- City code requires contiguity and typically annexation or waiver of protest to annexation; Council may waive certain requirements after a public hearing.
- Staff requested Council direction on whether to require a waiver of right to protest annexation, noting previous amendments did not include this requirement.

Council discussion included questions on rates, fairness, application requirements, precedent, and code compliance. Council generally expressed support for requiring waivers going forward.

Gina Dahl, City Attorney – spoke of the City Code stating the right to protest annexation was mandatory.

Council consensus – support application process and agreement.

Public comment:

- Jeff Kettleton - argued the City should require annexation (not only a waiver) when providing municipal services.

Public comment closed.

AGENDA ITEM #2 – Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Fees

Presenters: Gavin Woltjer, Parks/Rec/Public Lands Director and Kory Thompson, Recreation Superintendent

Staff presented proposed fee adjustments intended to reduce operational deficit and increase annual revenue by approximately \$105,000, noting long-standing inconsistencies and rising costs.

Key points presented:

- Goal is not full financial solvency through fees, but to close the operating deficit gap.
- Equity considerations were included to maintain access.
- Scholarship assistance exists for programs and pool passes.

Council discussion addressed scholarship access, impacts of event permit fee increases, possible annual review/escalator, possible half day use, and nonresident fee structure.

Council consensus – bring back to Council with a Performa/future goals and lean into commercial numbers.

Public comment:

None

~~**AGENDA ITEM #3 – Timing of Traffic Impact Study Submittals**~~ **REMOVED FROM AGENDA**

AGENDA ITEM #4 – Council Appointments to Community Boards and/or Committees and Council Subcommittees

Presenter: Chris Kukulski, City Administrator

Staff reviewed upcoming appointment needs for boards/commissions, Council subcommittees, and statutorily required Urban Renewal Advisory Committees.

Council discussed committee purpose and representation. Deadline for preferences: Thursday at 4:00 PM.

Mayor Nelson requested Councilmembers email their interest and he and Deputy Mayor Boyett would meet to make appointments.

Public comment:

None

HIGHLIGHT UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS OF COUNCIL INTEREST

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Councilmember Pitman requested consideration of returning to the dais seating arrangement for improved visibility and monitor use.

PUBLIC COMMENT – “NON-AGENDA ITEMS”

- Paul Clark - requested clarification on park event fees, raised questions about police and fire scheduling, expressed concerns about speeding/motorcycle behavior near Shiloh, suggested impounding uninsured vehicles, and referenced the South Park Pool project.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Nelson adjourned the meeting at 7:56 P.M.