

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

March 16, 2026 – 5:30 PM

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

Council Present:

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

Absent/Excused:

Councilmember Shaw

Staff Present:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator; Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator; Gina Dahl, City Attorney; Jeff Roach, Aviation and Transit Director; and Rich St. John, Police Chief

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)

- Kevin Nelson, Billings, MT, in reference to Item 2, spoke in favor of addressing the noise issues. He spoke against
- John Brewer, Chamber of Commerce, spoke in favor of the Airport Authority.
- Tom Rupsis, former Councilmember, spoke in favor of Item 2, and indicated the need for education and enforcement.
- Kim Curtis, Billings, MT, spoke in favor of stricter laws against noise and aggressive driving.
- Jeff Ketelsen, Billings, MT, spoke about a lack of information available for the Downtown Business Improvement District.

AGENDA ITEM #1 – Airport Authority Presentation

Presenter: Jeff Roach, Aviation and Transit Director and Steven Baldwin, Associates Aviation Consulting

Staff and consultants provided an overview of the ongoing Airport Governance Study, including project phases, stakeholder engagement, and potential transition to an airport authority model.

Key Points:

- Study includes three phases:
 1. Governance evaluation and recommendation
 2. Potential transition process (FAA coordination required)
 3. Post-transition support
- Billings is currently the only major Montana airport not governed by an authority model.
- Stakeholder engagement includes advisory committee, airport users, businesses, and City Council.
- No decision has been made; recommendations expected later in 2026

Council Discussion:

- Questions regarding:
 - Stakeholder input process and legal constraints (open meeting laws)
 - Role of FAA approval and regulatory requirements
 - Ownership vs. governance of airport property
 - Financial implications and transition costs
- Councilmembers discussed:
 - Regional importance of the airport
 - Efficiency and flexibility under an authority model
 - Concerns about relinquishing City control and asset ownership
 - Employee impacts and transition considerations

AGENDA ITEM #2 – Aggressive Driving Initiative

Presenter: Police Chief Rich St. John

Staff presented proposed updates to the City’s noise ordinance as a tool to address aggressive driving and excessive vehicle noise.

Key Points:

- Ordinance modernizes and clarifies enforcement of vehicle noise violations.
- Removes reliance on decibel readings for moving violations.
- Establishes clear, enforceable standards (e.g., audible at 50 feet).
- Intended to improve quality of life and provide enforceable tools for officers.

Council Direction:

- General support for moving the ordinance forward.
- Council requested:
 - Development of mandatory minimum fines for violations.
 - Review of broader fine structure, including reckless driving penalties.
- Consensus to:
 - Set minimum fines (suggested: \$300 first offense, \$500 subsequent).
 - Have staff return with refined penalty language.

Additional Discussion:

- Enforcement challenges (e.g., motorcycles, evasion, safety concerns).
- Importance of combining enforcement with education and signage.
- Potential consideration of “quiet zones” near sensitive areas (e.g., hospitals).

AGENDA ITEM #3 – Citizen Police Advisory Board

Presenter: Police Chief Rich St. John

Staff discussed the current status of the Citizen Police Advisory Board and recent Council direction delaying appointments.

Key Points:

- Board was previously renewed by Council and remains legally active.
- Membership terms have expired; appointments are pending.
- Board provides advisory input, community perspective, and transparency.

Council Direction:

- Refer review of the board structure to the Organizational/Operations Committee.
- Committee to evaluate:
 - Purpose and effectiveness of the board
 - Whether to continue, modify, or discontinue
- No immediate appointments made pending review.

AGENDA ITEM #4 – Changes to Council Meetings Discussion

Presenter: Councilmember Pitman

Council discussed potential changes to meeting structure, including scheduling, format, and public comment.

Discussion Topics & Outcomes:

1. Meeting Day (Monday vs. Tuesday)

- Discussion included scheduling, preparation time, and conflicts.
- **Consensus: Retain Monday meetings.**

2. Work Sessions vs. All Business Meetings

- Discussion included:
 - Efficiency vs. need for deliberation
 - Length and format of presentations
- **Consensus: Retain work sessions**, with interest in improving efficiency and reducing repetitive presentations.

3. Public Comment Structure

- Discussion included increasing opportunities for public input.
- **Consensus:**
 - Allow public comment after agenda items during work sessions.
 - Maintain relevance to agenda topics.
 - Staff to adjust agenda structure accordingly.

HIGHLIGHT UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS OF COUNCIL INTEREST

- Billings 2045 Comprehensive Plan discussions
- Upcoming budget process and Finance Committee work

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PUBLIC COMMENT – “NON-AGENDA ITEMS”

- Jonathan Angel, Billings, MT, spoke of the issues with the Police Department.
- Jeff Ketelsen, Billings, MT, spoke in favor of Councils decisions regarding Work Sessions.

ADJOURN: 7:38 PM