

CITY OF BILLINGS  
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY  
May 4, 2026 – 5:30 PM  
Council Chambers – City Hall, 316 N. 26th St., Billings, Montana

Council Present:

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

Absent/Excused:

Councilmember Neese  
Councilmember Aspenlieder

Staff Present:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator  
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator  
Gina Dahl, City Attorney  
Andy Zoeller, Finance Director  
Rich St. John, Police Chief  
Kelsie Rubich, Library Director

**PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)**

None

**AGENDA ITEM #1 – FY2027 Budget Overview**

Presenter: Andy Zoeller, Finance Director; Chris Kukulski, City Administrator

Overview:

Presentation of the FY2027 proposed budget overview, including revenues, expenditures, staffing, capital projects, and financial challenges.

Key Points:

- Proposed FY2027 budget includes approximately \$465 million in revenues and \$447 million in operating and capital expenditures
- Major capital projects include landfill cell expansion, transportation projects, water transmission line improvements, airport terminal improvements, and South Park Pool funding
- Proposed budget includes 18 new positions across multiple departments
- Property tax increase assumptions based on a 2.95% inflationary adjustment under state law
- Utility rate increases and assessment adjustments are included in the proposed budget
- Discussion regarding the use of marijuana excise tax revenue to support public safety operations
- Overview of general fund and public safety fund financial challenges and use of reserves
- Presentation of proposed budget timeline and work session schedule

Council Discussion:

- Questions regarding budget amendments and Council authority over future budget changes
- Discussion on the use of marijuana tax revenue and concerns about shifting funds from prevention-related uses
- Clarification regarding the proposed TIF coordinator position

- Discussion about liability insurance increases and risk management efforts
- Questions regarding reserve levels and assessment increases
- Discussion on property tax billing adjustments related to refinery valuation appeals and state law changes
- Comments regarding maintaining perspective on city services relative to property tax costs

Public Comment:  
None

Council Direction:  
• Continue FY2027 budget review process and departmental presentations

## **AGENDA ITEM #2 – FY2027 Departmental Budget Presentations**

Presenter: Andy Zoeller, Finance Director

Key Points:

- General Fund budget totals approximately \$46 million
- Includes transfers supporting public safety, parks and recreation, library operations, and community development
- Includes proposed additional commercial code enforcement officer position
- Highlights increased costs for software, facilities, insurance, and IT services
- Discussion regarding declining franchise fee revenues from cable providers

Council Discussion:

- Questions regarding the proposed commercial code enforcement officer position and related revenues
- Discussion regarding future impacts of declining franchise fee revenues
- Discussion on repayment timeline for City Hall debt supported by marijuana tax revenue

Public Comment:  
None

Council Direction:  
• Continue review of General Fund operations and future funding considerations

## **LIBRARY BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Presenter: Kelsie Rubich, Library Director

Key Points:

- Library serves all of Yellowstone County through central library, bookmobiles, lockers, and outreach services
- Usage metrics increased across nearly all service categories during the past year
- Library was named Montana Library of the Year
- FY2027 proposed budget includes approximately \$5.6 million in expenditures
- Library anticipates use of approximately \$730,000 in reserves to balance operations
- Discussion regarding declining entitlement share revenues and reduced mill value impacts
- Strategic planning efforts include future building improvements, technology investments, and expanded services

Council Discussion:

- Discussion regarding long-term sustainability and reliance on reserves
- Questions regarding user fees, partnerships, fundraising, and future levy possibilities
- Discussion regarding library mill structure and interlocal agreement requirements
- Comments regarding the value of library services relative to taxpayer costs
- Discussion regarding legislative impacts on entitlement share funding

Public Comment:  
None

Council Direction:  
• Continue evaluation of long-term library funding options and strategic planning priorities

## **POLICE BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Presenter: Rich St. John, Police Chief

Key Points:

- Proposed Police Department budget totals approximately \$37.8 million
- Personnel costs comprise approximately 75% of department expenditures
- Budget includes funding for Axon technology platform transition
- Discussion regarding future records management system replacement needs
- Staffing levels currently include 171 sworn officers out of 177 authorized positions
- Department continues recruitment efforts and anticipates multiple retirements
- Increased costs include wage adjustments, benefits, insurance, investigative services, and technology expenses
- Discussion regarding gang activity monitoring, behavioral health challenges, and workforce wellness initiatives

Council Discussion:

- Discussion regarding potential use of marijuana tax revenue for one-time technology investments versus ongoing operations
- Questions regarding future public safety levy needs
- Discussion regarding Axon system efficiencies and overtime reductions
- Questions regarding records management system costs and subscription structures
- Discussion regarding animal control licensing and online licensing opportunities
- Comments regarding police staffing, recruitment, and training programs

Public Comment:

None

Council Direction:

- Continue evaluation of public safety technology and future funding needs

**HIGHLIGHT UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS OF COUNCIL INTEREST**

- FY2027 budget work sessions
- Billings 2045 planning process

**COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

- Councilmember O'Donnell announced the National Day of Prayer event scheduled for Thursday, May 7, 2026, and noted the ongoing public Bible reading event.

**PUBLIC COMMENT – NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

None

**ADJOURN:** 8:40 P.M.