

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

July 20, 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 Aguirre
Councilmember Kennedy
Councilmember Aspenlieder
Councilmember Lindley
Councilmember Boyett
Councilmember O'Donnell

Absent/Excused

Councilmember Pitman

Staff Present

Kevin Iffland, Interim City Administrator
Gina Dahl, City Attorney
Daniela Pavuk, Assistant City Attorney
Todd Corne, Deputy City Attorney (via Zoom)
Laura Watson, Deputy City Attorney
Jessica McKee, Deputy City Attorney
Mac Fogelson, City Engineer
Will Robbins, Staff Engineer
Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner
Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator
Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director
Anna Vickers, Planning Manager

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)

- Lain Dorsey, encouraged Council to allow Billings to become a sanctuary city.
- James Cameron, spoke of construction and encroachments occurring on their property.
- Tessa Miller, encouraged Council to allow Billings to become a sanctuary city.
- Mindy Nelson, asked for a commitment from Council to allow Billings to become a sanctuary city.

- Brooke Bigler, encouraged Council to allow Billings to become a sanctuary city.
- Paul Clark, spoke of issues with illegal aliens entering the United States. He also spoke of Flock cameras and a recent shooting.

1. W.O. 26-11: Monad Road Reconstruction Update

Mac Fogelson, City Engineer, presented a 30 percent design update for the proposed Monad Road Reconstruction Project, outlining improvements that include roadway reconstruction, utility replacement, storm drainage upgrades, street lighting, pedestrian facilities, and access management designed to improve safety and traffic operations along the corridor. He explained that the project addresses deteriorating pavement, inadequate drainage, aging infrastructure, and operational concerns at the railroad crossing and More Lane intersection.

Councilmembers devoted much of the discussion to the proposed multi-use path, questioning whether the additional width and associated cost were appropriate for an industrial corridor with heavy truck traffic and limited existing bicycle activity. Several Councilmembers suggested a standard sidewalk may adequately serve pedestrians while reducing construction costs and allowing available funding to be directed toward other transportation priorities. Mac responded that the shared-use path is consistent with the City's Complete Streets Policy and Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and provides a safer, more accessible connection for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. He also noted that the design would continue to be evaluated as engineering progresses.

Councilmembers also discussed roadway geometry, access management, drainage improvements, right-of-way limitations, traffic flow near More Lane, and future maintenance responsibilities. Questions were raised regarding pedestrian demand, snow removal, and opportunities to improve lane alignment and driver safety. Mac explained that the project balances transportation needs with existing physical constraints and will continue to be refined through additional engineering analysis and coordination with affected property owners.

Public Comment:

- Sonya Davis, spoke in support of creating better pedestrian access on Moore Lane and Daniel Street.

Following discussion, Council generally expressed support for reconstructing the deteriorated roadway while requesting that staff continue evaluating the extent and design of the proposed multi-use path.

2. Economic and Financial Analysis of Complete Streets

Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner, introduced the agenda item by presenting the findings of an economic and financial analysis evaluating the implementation of Complete Streets principles within the City of Billings. She explained that the purpose of the study was not to revisit or amend the City's adopted Complete Streets Policy, but rather to provide Council with objective information regarding the potential fiscal impacts, economic benefits, transportation outcomes, and long-term maintenance considerations associated with incorporating Complete Streets elements into future capital improvement projects.

Ann Ormsbee, Cambridge Econometrics, explained that Complete Streets is not a single roadway design but a planning approach intended to consider the needs of all users—including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, freight traffic, emergency responders, and individuals with disabilities—while recognizing that roadway design should be appropriate for each corridor. She emphasized that Complete Streets does not require every transportation project to include sidewalks, bicycle lanes, or other multimodal facilities, but instead encourages context-sensitive solutions based on surrounding land use, traffic volumes, available right-of-way, and community needs.

The consultant reviewed research regarding safety, economic development, property values, and transportation funding, while noting that roadway designs should be tailored to the function and context of each corridor. Staff explained that incorporating pedestrian and bicycle facilities during initial construction is generally more cost-effective than adding them later and may improve eligibility for state and federal grant funding.

Councilmembers questioned whether the findings from other communities were applicable to Billings, expressed concern about the cost of multimodal infrastructure, and discussed ongoing maintenance responsibilities and priorities for limited transportation funding.

Councilmembers also discussed balancing investments in roadway preservation with future transportation options, recognizing the importance of improving safety while remaining fiscally responsible. No formal action was requested or taken.

Several Councilmembers emphasized that younger residents increasingly seek communities offering multiple transportation options and suggested that transportation planning should anticipate future growth rather than simply respond to current travel patterns.

Recess at 7:12 P.M. Reconvene at 7:23 P.M.

Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator, focused on the relationship between Complete Streets and property rights. Elyse clarified that adoption of Complete Streets principles does not authorize acquisition of additional right-of-way without following established legal procedures. Instead, roadway improvements continue to be evaluated

individually through the Capital Improvement Program, public engagement process, environmental review, engineering analysis, and Council approval before construction.

Public Comment:

None

Council concluded the discussion by acknowledging that transportation investments involve balancing fiscal responsibility, public safety, economic development, and community expectations. While differing opinions remained regarding the appropriate level of multimodal investment, members generally agreed that future transportation projects should continue to be evaluated individually, with consideration given to corridor function, anticipated use, available funding, long-term maintenance obligations, and community priorities before final design decisions are made.

3. Civil Litigation Process

Gina Dahl, City Attorney; Daniela Pavuk, Assistant City Attorney; Todd Corne, Deputy City Attorney (via Zoom); Laura Watson, Deputy City Attorney; and Jessica McKee, Deputy City Attorney provided Council with an overview of the civil litigation process, explaining how claims against the City are received, investigated, defended, and, when appropriate, resolved through settlement or litigation. They outlined the various stages of a civil case, including the filing of claims, preservation of records, discovery, negotiations, trial, and potential appeals, while emphasizing the importance of timely documentation and coordination among City departments.

They also reviewed the respective roles of the City Attorney, insurance carriers, outside legal counsel, and Council throughout the process. Council was advised that pending litigation and legal strategy are often discussed in executive session as permitted by Montana law to preserve attorney-client privilege; however, any final decisions or official actions must occur in open session.

Council members asked questions regarding settlement authority, insurance coverage, litigation costs, public records preservation, and how elected officials should respond to inquiries concerning pending legal matters. City Attorney's office emphasized the importance of protecting confidential legal communications while maintaining transparency consistent with Montana's open meeting requirements.

Public Comment:

None

Council thanked staff for the informational presentation, noting that the overview provided a better understanding of the City's legal processes and the responsibilities of elected officials when litigation arises. No formal action was requested or taken.

4. Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan Update

Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director and Anna Vickers, Planning Manager Planning, presented an overview of the Billings Heights Neighborhood Plan update, explaining that the effort is intended to provide a long-range vision for future growth, redevelopment, transportation, housing, parks, and public infrastructure within the Heights area. They noted that the update builds upon previous planning efforts while incorporating current development trends, population growth, and extensive public input gathered through community meetings, surveys, and stakeholder engagement.

They reviewed the planning process, highlighting key themes identified by residents, including preserving neighborhood character, improving transportation connectivity, expanding parks and trail opportunities, supporting commercial development, and addressing future infrastructure needs. The draft plan identifies goals and strategies to guide future land use decisions while serving as a policy document for future development proposals and capital improvement planning.

Councilmembers discussed the importance of balancing continued growth with preservation of existing neighborhoods. Several members emphasized the need to improve roadway connectivity, address traffic congestion, and ensure infrastructure keeps pace with residential and commercial development. Questions were also raised regarding implementation priorities, funding opportunities, and how the plan would coordinate with future subdivision development.

Wyeth and Anna explained that the neighborhood plan serves as a guiding document rather than a regulatory ordinance and that implementation will occur over time through future development review, capital improvement projects, zoning decisions, and public-private partnerships. Council generally expressed support for continued public engagement and refinement of the plan as it moves toward final adoption.

Public Comment:

- Jeff Ketelsen, spoke of the need for impact fees to pay for improvements.

5. West Billings Neighborhood Plan Update

Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director and Anna Vickers, Planning Manager, presented an update on the West Billings Neighborhood Plan, summarizing the planning process, public outreach efforts, and key recommendations intended to guide future growth and development in the west Billings area. They explained that the plan establishes a long-term vision for land use, transportation, parks, housing, public facilities, and infrastructure while identifying strategies to accommodate future development and maintain the area's character.

Councilmembers discussed anticipated growth, roadway connectivity, infrastructure needs, and the importance of coordinating future development with transportation and utility improvements. Questions were also raised regarding implementation priorities and how the plan will be used to guide future land use and capital improvement decisions.

Wyeth and Anna explained that the neighborhood plan is a policy document that will serve as a guide for future planning, zoning, and development decisions but does not create new regulatory requirements. Councilmembers expressed appreciation for the public engagement efforts and supported continued refinement of the plan before it returns for future consideration. No formal action was requested or taken.

Public Comment:

- Jeff Ketelsen, spoke of the need for impact fees to pay for improvements.

6. Solid Waste Collection and Disposal Amendments

Jennifer Duray, Public Works Deputy Director, presented proposed amendments to the City's solid waste collection and disposal regulations, explaining that the updates are intended to clarify existing requirements, improve operational efficiency, and address issues identified through the administration of the current ordinance. She reviewed the proposed changes, including updates to service requirements, definitions, collection standards, and administrative procedures.

Councilmembers asked questions regarding the purpose of the amendments, enforcement, customer service impacts, and how the proposed changes would affect residents and commercial customers. Discussion also focused on operational efficiencies, consistency in service delivery, and ensuring the ordinance provides sufficient flexibility to address future needs while maintaining reliable solid waste services.

Jennifer responded to Councilmembers' questions and explained that the amendments are intended to improve clarity and streamline operations without significantly changing the level of service provided to customers. Overall Council consensus - require closed trash lids.

Public Comment:

None

Highlight Upcoming Items of Council Interest.

Council Discussion:

Impact fees being worked on.

Kennedy - Legislative Committee meeting on July 22nd 3-4:30 P.M.

Public Comment:

None

Recess to Closed Executive Session

Adjourn: 10:44 P.M.

